

USEFULNESS

What is the use of the stage arts?

What is a stage for you? What do you want to happen there?

How do you act on the world through the stage arts? What do you want to provoke?

Is it important to achieve pleasure?

Is it possible to gain knowledge?

Do stage arts have to be useful? Can they be useless?

Angélica Liddell

Usefulness belongs to the scientific and technical sphere. I work within the sphere of uselessness. That does not make me better or special, I am simply useless. I feel that there is more honesty and exigency in science and technology than in culture. We culture people are a more depressing, tiresome and vulgar representation of decadence, coated in hippyism, installed in an ethics without a trace of kindness (and what is ethics without kindness), seeking relationships only with those people from whom we can get some benefit, the opportunists, more concerned about the fate of a handful of mediocre people than the fate of beauty and thought.

Albert Serra

For me the performing arts are a form of artistic expression that have a peculiarity not shared with any other art: the moment of creation coincides with the time of delivery. They are no longer a representation, not even an *expression* of life, they are life itself. That is, for me, the most important thing and my work is based on taking advantage of this unique aspect which is what distances performing arts from the other arts. Beauty that can be created, however meagre, must necessarily derive from this principle and may not be comparable to that created by another art form. This purity can not be sullied. At the same time, I believe in the supremacy of theatre over the other performing arts (dance, performance, etc.) because it incorporates, by tradition, an element of extraordinary richness, the word, and comes to make very refined use of it. For all the rest it is like all arts: proudly useless in everything except its own beauty ... but as Baudelaire said, "*Beauty is the promise of happiness.*"

Lola Arias

If I answered with my eyes closed I would say that art is useless. But in fact my works are useful for different reasons. *Mi vida después* was very useful for the actors

that worked with me because it gave them an excuse to review their past like spies, to ask uncomfortable questions of their families, to meet people who knew their parents if these were deceased.

While we were showing the work in Argentina, unexpected things happened. In the work, Carla produces a remake of her father's death. He was a member of the ERP (People's Revolutionary Army), in the battle at Monte Chingolo between the guerrilla and the military. At one of the shows, a man from the audience waited for Carla at the exit to tell her that his mother was in the same car as Carla's father when he died and he told her details of the story that she didn't know. Then theatre was useful in completing Carla's private history and, also, our country's history.

Sergi Fàustino

I believe that the performing arts can be many things and, therefore, can be useful for many things. This means possibilities that are practically unattainable, and it is these possibilities that greatly arouse my interest. If I try to give a single definition of what the performing arts are useful for, I am playing against my own interests and against the spirit of what I understand by the performing arts.

If the performing arts can be many things, on a stage many things can also happen (even though the performing arts are not necessarily linked to a stage). In any case what is a stage? A space to show/present ideas? No, it is not only that. It can also be a space to see a personality or a space for exchange...

Sometimes I want to provoke a reflection, sometimes an exchange, sometimes a feeling linked to a sensation, sometimes a game, sometimes communication, sometimes to share information...

The performing arts don't "have" to be anything and they can be everything.

Jordi Oriol

I find it strange, indeed, not having a firm or radical opinion about the usefulness of art in general. Over the years, I've had very different – and sometimes contradictory – thoughts on this issue; to the point of thinking that it depends on the people, the place and time of life (or in history). It depends on the project in which the artist is immersed; on the audience addressed; on the environment where it is shown or read. But I do not think – at least for now, and unlike Oscar Wilde – that it will ever become entirely useless.

What is clear is that "creation" is the most mysterious, incredible and fascinating thing in the Universe. We may be able to understand any development or transformation of matter. But every time something arises

that had never existed previously – when a child is born or, overnight, a plant sprouts from among clumps of earth, it makes us feel that something supernatural has happened, the symptom of a superhuman, divine power. It moves us and makes us reflect on our own existence, and it links us – suddenly – with the past and the future. This reflection makes us different from other animals; maybe that's why we feel the need / desire / responsibility to leave a legacy for those who will follow, as those who went before did so that we would become who we are today.

At the very least, art helps us be aware of the course of history and gives us these moments of inexplicable sensory commotion. A segregation of chemical substances that, among others, can produce pleasure. The pleasure of understanding, or that of enjoying. The pleasure of contemplating beauty, or of learning... I also believe in the social and therapeutic aspect of art, especially for the person producing it. It is a way of putting everything stirring in one's head on a stage, the stage of the mind.

The performing arts are merely a conglomeration of arts, such as music, poetry, dance, gesture, architecture, painting, and many more that have been slowly added to it throughout history, but that have been losing their ritual origin (in which the spectator also undergoes this mystical experience fusing with the rest and participating in a collective ceremony), which Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty sought to recover and as defended by many others. Maybe today the performing arts are not entirely useful, but that does not mean that they are no longer necessary.

Àlex Serrano

It is difficult to make a quantitative assessment of a fact that even qualitatively speaking is not measurable. In fact, perhaps its real usefulness may be linked to what is useless. In the words of Joan Brossa, "*I think that civilization is the art of creating useless needs.*"

Societat Doctor Alonso

The performing arts should not be subject to a specific usefulness.

Diego Anido

Bringing the artistic event closer to people who receive it with a shorter distance than in other arts. A shorter distance between what is created by people and its observer. A stage is a physical representation of the space in which mental states are manifested. On a stage I want the unexpected to happen.

Having other people as the only recipients from among the components of what we call world, on them the action would be that of, drop by drop, trying to show a void

that I believe exists in each person (assuming that plants, animals and the stones do not feel that void).

Yes, it is important to get pleasure, but not as an end. Although at times the final symptom of a whole process of relating that one has when faced with a work of art is, in some way, pleasure.

Perhaps the audience can achieve knowledge in moments of catharsis with the work, although I'm not sure.

Its own usefulness is inherent to any action.

And I will not contradict myself even if I screw up: its own usefulness is inherent to any action.

THE AUDIENCE

Which audience do you address? Do you have an image of it? Is there any kind of audience you reject?

Should the priority of public theatre be the audience?

What relationship do you want to establish with spectators?

What space for creation do you confer upon them?

Angélica Liddell

I am going to use Flannery O'Connor, the end of her story *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. And what I would say about the audience is that they would be good people if someone had been about to shoot them every day of their lives. That is why you have to shoot people on stage, for them to be good people for a few hours, at least. Shooting is a moral project.

Albert Serra

With the audience I always try to follow a custom which comes from romanticism and symbolism and that powerfully materialised in the twentieth century in the avant-gardes, rock 'n' roll, dictators... which is to underrate the audience and, especially, your own audience. Audience members are as free as I am to do what they want. Similarly, I am not worried about whether I interest the audience, or the audience interests me. However, their view might slightly change my work, which would incorporate it and possibly be improved by this view. This mechanism, in theatre, can be quite explicit, less subtle than in painting, for example. This is something I always bear in mind. The fact that I do not provoke or seek it, does not mean it does not happen. The public theatre has a duty, stronger even than that of the great creators (due to what I mentioned about audience view) to underrate the audience. The public theatre has to conserve an artistic legacy from the past and seek to enrich it in the present. That is its duty to the community.

Lola Arias

I don't like to think that the audience is a group of anonymous people in the dark watching a group of special people under a strong light displaying their histrionics in order to be admired.

I like to think that actors are fragile and human, that the audience listens to them uncomfortably and curiously as when one listens to someone telling a secret. In *Mi vida después* it was very important for me to maintain this feeling that what is told has an emotional, private yet also a political value and that what happens on stage is at times unpredictable.

In *Striptease* a baby moves around mid-stage as he pleases while his parents hold a phone conversation. In this case the text was entirely fictional but it was always performed by a mother and her real baby because what you see is that relationship of absolute need between mother and child. The audience said that the play made it fearful due to the baby's excessive fragility, but in fact their fear was not for the baby, but for what can not be controlled, like the mechanism of this work: what happens really happens, but it takes place inside a fiction.

Sergi Fàustino

To be honest, I do not have an image because I am not addressing any audience in particular. When I am creating I do what my body asks, from a position of sincerity and accepting my limitations. Regarding the audience, I believe that if I produce a rigorous work and don't try and pretend I'm something I am not, that will be noticed in the piece and there will be someone who will appreciate it.

I think that public theatre should not have the audience as its priority, unless what is wanted is for public theatre to be a great musical. But public theatre must be exclusive. The audience must be considered in the same way as research and risk.

Jordi Oriol

It's not necessary to be careful with the audience, but the audience must be taken into account. I think that every piece of art is completed in the folds of the brain of the person who observes it, listens to it, reads, feels, tastes or swallows it. The artist, when creating, should leave sufficient space to allow the audience (with its culture, concerns, fears and desires) to complete the work; but with sufficient caution to avoid leaving such a huge void that the spectator abandons any effort to fill the gap, so that some rational or emotional meaning can be generated. Only then, will the spectator live through a shared experience.

The audience that seeks what is still undigested is my favourite interlocutor.

Àlex Serrano

I always attend all the performances and tours of our plays. Every time they open the doors of the hall and the audience starts to enter (people who I don't know and who I doubt know me), I'm surprised. I know that some of them are there because they decided to go and see a play with a theatrical approach that is "different" to what is usual, although sometimes I think that perhaps they have been attracted by the picture on the poster, or because somebody gave them a ticket or they simply sneaked into the theatre by the back door. Beyond that, I talk to a broad audience that goes to the theatre because it feels like it and needs to see unique proposals and assumes the challenge of being excited, bored, stirred or remaining indifferent without any prior guarantee. The only audience I reject is a scared one.

One always tends to reflect on the absurd dilemma of whether to reward quality over audience or whether the contrary should be true, something which always leads to relativistic evaluations that end up affirming that any option is valid and all are equally respectable. Wrong. For me, a public theatre is a tool for supporting and bringing to the audience proposals that are really unusual and unique, without such catches as creators' shares or theatre occupancy rates.

Societat Doctor Alonso

We think that the entire audience is intelligent, we try to let it have a space to imagine.

Diego Anido

At the outset I address the entire audience. In general, adult. Flesh-coloured people, with flesh of all colours. The struggle is the confrontation between what you want the viewer to construct in his imagination and everything that the creator chews over for fear that the public will not understand.

LANGUAGE

What does your creative process involve?

What role does writing play in it?

What role does improvisation play in it?

What are your languages?

What is an actor?

What role do technological resources play for you in the world of performance?

What is your relationship like with the other arts?

Angélica Liddell

I want to write the alphabet on my back using razors. I always find language to be insufficient. I would like to learn to write all over again, like children do.

Albert Serra

For me, in theatre, the most important thing is the adaptation of the word to the actor. Interestingly, and against what would seem logical, the word has more autonomy for me in cinema than in theatre.

I still haven't understood why, to tell the truth. But that's the way it is. In cinema the word can get to move alone, but in theatre I don't know how to do it, even though a less functional and more poetic language is used!

Anyway, I worked very little in theatre as a director. I lack experience to have deep-founded and precise ideas on theatrical language, especially on staging.

Lola Arias

Each play begins in a different way. Sometimes it all starts with a sentence, sometimes with an idea, sometimes with a place or a person I knew. But writing is always the way in which ideas are developed within me. All the works I did were written by me, no matter whether they tell someone's real life story or a story that was born in my head. Writing is my way of understanding things. I write to understand the world around me.

Sergi Faustino

Every creative process is built according to the needs and the evolution of the process itself. Therefore, writing, improvisation, the languages, the actors, the technological media and other arts appear or not, have more or less importance, according to the demands of the creative process.

Jordi Oriol

I have no particular method, but basically – for shows where I am author and director – I start out with the writing (images, situations, monologues or dialogues...), and when I start to have a more or less clear path along which to travel, I usually share it with the other team members, to define – above all – a visual and musical aesthetic on which to start constructing.

This process of writing and feedback with the team would be – if one can put it this way – my desk work, to obtain quite a finished score, with the style, tempo and instruments in play as highly defined as possible. But from there, and for a good time, nothing is set in stone and everything is valid. The idea is to open up as many doors as possible. Improvisation allows this opening and helps to find things that you weren't looking for, surprising things that emerge from both freshness and tiredness, and that it is worth detecting to ensure they do not escape.

I also try researching new ways of saying a text, creating atmospheres or showing or proposing a situation, and trying not to stay with the first solution. While there is

no fear, while there is daring and a desire to play, exploration and experimentation work is very productive and fruitful. When the fears and distrust begin, and time starts pressing you, your common sense mists over and you lose the mother of science and the will to explore; you overlook all those little things that demand patience and a time to settle down. Working with different languages and disciplines may enable this tangle to be unknotted, opening new paths that sometimes make the creation process flow. Music, for me, is a language that, because of its abstract dimensions, serves as a bridge and as a gear assembly for the other disciplines. A very responsive engine.

Àlex Serrano

Each project has its own peculiarities that make it special, but basically they all follow a similar pattern. Pau Palacios and myself concentrate on finding a concept generator, which we continually reformulate and test out until we have something solid and unequivocal. Thereafter, we initiate a long process in which the creative part and production design, with its economic and executive aspects, have a similar weight. We create taking limitations into account, and trying to convert them into opportunities. Barbara Bloin, who is head of production, has as much to say in this as Pau and I; that is why it is she who later stands as assistant director because she is perfectly aware of the balance between creation and possibilities.

From the moment we start rehearsals, the work becomes a common task of all the members. We don't like working with a hierarchical structure, which often ends up isolating and segmenting the groups. We prefer that everyone be responsible for part of its creation, making it their own and living it as their own. We feel comfortable with this way of working, because the whole team can be involved and feel the project is their own, and thus we eliminate the figure of the mercenary.

We try to have plays fairly advanced before the premiere. This allows leeway to listen and incorporate the opinions of friends and "advisors", and especially to try not to contaminate the work with the characteristic dynamics of stress and pressure from the moments prior to the premiere. From this point, in entering its natural process of touring, the play acquires a life of its own. Except during the first performances, we very much limit giving notes to the performers. During the tour it is they who sound out the work and transform it daily. We thus aim for the play to stop being a repetition of itself by ensuring that

somehow, during each performance, the initial seed takes sides, is restored and then relives.

Our proposals do not fall within textual theatre, this means that the writing is reduced to initial texts that are conceptual in nature and a document containing the dramatic focus and a record of scenes / ideas is generated. Once we enter the theatre, all these prior documents disappear and we start working simply with an index, with some marks of elements that the scene must contain.

We rely greatly on rhythmic improvisation. The scenes are proposed on paper, but it is in the research work in the rehearsals room where they are shaped, drawn out and new versions created. As I said before, in the rehearsals room we work with an index where the initial order of the scenes is noted along with the general and particular guidelines for each. For example, in this document it is noted that in a scene X, a choreography is developed based on a concept and with a specific video element, or that one of the performers says a text to the audience, based on a specific premise. It is in the rehearsals room, working from patterns and improvisations, where we have to give shape to the choreography, working the video element and finding the final text.

Our languages are visual theatre, dance, video scenes, computer-generated interaction and performance.

As for the cast, we work with the idea of actors, executors, handlers and transmitters of the piece, rather than "characters" or "figures". The fact that Ester Forment and Diego Anido, regulars in our creations, are now authors and directors of their own proposals explains very well how we understand their role in the creation of proposals by the Agrupación Señor Serrano. We prefer to talk about *performers who are collaborators in the creation*. It is not simply a question of terminology, but rather a way of understanding the roles in a team where all parties shape the creation. Choosing a *performer* rather than an *actor* is simultaneously a positioning of the role played in the scene and how it relates to own material in the work and with the audience.

We could say that, at least for now, our house brand when staging is in the use of technology and video scenes as an element integrated into the narrative discourse. Thus, within our team, the figure of the creator-technician predominates. In all our plays, and especially in *Artefacte*, the interaction of video in real time has a very important role in the creative proposal. Martí Sanchez, who is in charge of designing our plays in these terms, has turned out to be an indisputable figure of major importance in all of our creations,

who develops and provides "custom solutions" that are always based on and produced from the root-concept.

Societat Doctor Alonso

We are more interested in the how than the what.

Diego Anido

Each project has its own needs. That is what combining the different languages holds. But it almost always starts with an updating of the issue to be dealt with, the research and initial outline of the drama. After comes the rehearsals period with samples and then a more or less official presentation.

The writing appears at two moments: at the beginning, with the description of the drama and the first versions of the texts that will be worked, and afterwards, in the rewriting of the texts, which is always necessary.

Improvisation is also on two different levels: at first, to create the scenes described in the dramatic script or to develop materials that are then described in the drama, and on a second level, in the small spaces for improvisation, located in the final outcome of the piece.

A performer is a stage instrument, but one with the ability to generate material independently. For me, for now, it is the most important element.

Technological resources are one more tool you can use when composing. They are like any other format: if abused, they take on a protagonism that is probably not in agreement with the discourse of the piece and therefore with which to count, when composing. And with them occur as with any other medium: if you abuse it, it takes on a role that is certainly not consistent with the discourse of the piece and therefore they become critical elements. And as the more advanced resources do not yet appear to be well assimilated, by either creators or audience, they become a bonus when it comes to evaluating them, both negatively and positively.

As for the relationship of our work with the other arts: the relationship is one of prudence, because when it isn't there, what usually happens is that the messages proposed by each of the arts separately are underlined.

QUESTIONING

What lines of contemporary thought interest you?

What do you think are the major issues to address today? Do you prefer minor themes?

Must we fight boredom?

Should we fight immaturity or defend it?

How much political influence do the performing arts have?

How you relate to confusion?

What is your dream? What space remains for utopia?

Angélica Liddell

I always go against the grain, I can't avoid it, it's my trigger, I work with everything that I despise, everything that hurts me, everything that tires me.

Albert Serra

The twentieth century has definitively affirmed the autonomy of art with respect to society (in fact, with respect to the author). The philosophy of language has been theoretical. Formalism has prevailed. Today the artist can only withdraw into his *ivory tower* and work the language. There is no other way out. Within this framework, however, the possibilities are endless and the legacy of the avant-gardes, for the true artist, is more valid than ever. Anyone who does not follow this path, who does not produce an art in permanent formal tension, in a permanent quest for originality, does not form part of true art nor of true tradition and is irrelevant. Personally it's all the same to me. I only have a slight aesthetic preference for issues that are far from the bourgeois imagination. Value judgments today are very difficult, because of the confusion. Therefore, I avoid them as much as I can (or I make them so categorical and arbitrary that they have no meaning); I prefer to search for an "illusion" (Baudrillard) behind any form of artistic expression. Believing today in the possibility of transforming society, or even having any influence on it, through art, is, I would say, clownery.

Lola Arias

I like radical, poetic, political art. I love it when I don't quite understand the emotions that something causes me, when I'm trapped and I do not know why. But I also like it when I get bored a bit in the theatre and I can think about other things and then go back to it.

I like unpredictable works but I also like those based on one single idea from start to finish.

I don't have utopian dreams but I do have dreams when I sleep. Almost always my dreams turn into works. Yesterday I dreamed that I was given an abandoned baby that was covered with mould to wash it. It was a very distressing dream, we'll see whether a work may arise from it.

Sergi Faustino

As for themes, what I value is that the vision presented is personal. If it is sincere and personal I don't care if the subject is major or minor, or more or less mature, or more or less political. As for the possible political impact of the arts, I have my

doubts. It depends on what we understand as politics. If we understand that the origin of politics is a vital positioning towards life, then the performing arts can have an impact, especially those works that manage to create a questioning in the spectator on a personal level. However, if we refer to politics with the idea that the performing arts may change the functioning of society, then that is when I am not so clear. What happens is that the context is very difficult because, whether we like it or not, the performing arts are an entertainment for the bourgeoisie, and from this platform it is difficult to change things.

Àlex Serrano

We are not interested in showing current affairs on stage, we do not adhere to any line of social, political or protest theatre. Perhaps we address "big issues", but try and do it through small things, excuses, transpositions. Hovering over our plays is always the idea of failure, the futile struggle, and we do this through such themes as guilt, repetition, nature and memory. But we try to be careful not to lecture, not to "teach" or complain. What interests us is presenting a personal and poetic view. In a certain way, we reject laying down any thesis, perhaps that is why this "failure" that always accompanies us means all these "big issues" can become something small, casual and almost anecdotal at the moment they collapse on themselves, that they condemn themselves, that they implode to display an empty map where beauty emerges from its sterility and resignation.

Societat Doctor Alonso

There is no fracture between questioning in our daily lives and work.

CONSUMPTION

What part of the performing arts lives on?

What legacy have you received? Who are your teachers?

What, to you, are the boundaries of intellectual property?

Do you like quoting your own shows?

Do you like the idea of keeping a certain stage repertoire alive?

What are we consuming when we consume theatre?

Angélica Liddell

I hate giving opinions on those worn-out issues about being politically correct. Dribble on dribble from always saying the same thing, I hate giving my opinion about the opinion of the majority, I hate giving my opinion on general opinions, I hate giving my opinion on those ISSUES about which everyone agrees, I'm increasingly bored by it and I complain about all the times that I have taken part in DRIBBLE

OPINIONISM, fortunately my disobedience spring starts up increasingly quickly. And also, I consume a lot of water, really a lot, I study texts in the shower, imagine the water I consume, litres and litres and litres. I would prefer to talk about how the flame of a candle is consumed, or how the bodies of drowned horses are consumed, I have seen them on television, drowned, there was a drowned horse, with its head hanging over the door of the stable, and it moved me deeply.

Albert Serra

Therefore, a repertoire of theatrical texts can be maintained but the staging cannot. That is wanting to deny the fatalism of the performing arts, but therein lies their charm. The repertoire can only be understood from the consumerist logic that has nothing to do with dramatic logic. I hate repeats and actors or directors who return to projects already completed. It is a task that makes no sense, even from an archaeological point of view, because there will always be the danger of falling into the contradiction of performing a representation of a representation.

Lola Arias

The strange thing about theatre in relation to the other arts is that it only lasts in the memory, in the minds of people who saw it. This ephemeral aspect of theatre is what makes it so cruel, so much like life itself. Works are strange animals that live in contact with the audience for one to three years. To create a work of art that is mortal is rather sad but also a great relief. Everything that is born has to die sometime.

Sergi Faustino

Of the performing arts very little remains / endures because, in most cases, it is based on what is direct, on the experience of sharing a space and a time. But that does not mean that it must always be so, sometimes there are jobs that end up materialising in formats that do allow the work to remain, or at least a substantial part of it. Then there is the whole issue of the archive, the video recordings, which obviously are not the same, but as a means of consultation are very valid.

I am not too clear on the limits of intellectual property rights but I think there are no absolute truths and the context should be considered.

In general, I do not much like talking about my shows.

Of course I find it a good idea to keep a repertoire alive and I don't understand this dictatorship of new work that exists here in Barcelona. I do not understand why the vast majority of things presented have to be premieres. I think that time can give a

very valid perspective to assess a show and whether it is good or not, and I do not understand why you can not repeat it as many times as necessary. The repeat of *La pantera imperial* is a great example of this and I hope to repeat it with other shows, to see if things change. In short: when a show is good, the amount of time that has passed doesn't matter.

Jordi Oriol

We tend to label our society a consumer society, one of accumulative anxiety, of the desire to always have more. But I think that current consumerism does not lie in accumulation, but in speed, in the willingness to do without things; not in acquisition, but in change. Getting rid of what existed and substituting it with new things. We do the same with theatre. Only those experiences with which we really connect will continue with us to be mixed with those that we had not yet launched. We will be that sediment that we absorb and do not shed.

To prosper, it is worth someone feeling your story is their own, that your idea is their own. We will get people to listen to how our weekend was if first of all we ask how theirs went. Everything belongs to everyone.

Àlex Serrano

My teachers are my parents, my brother, my partner, my friends.

Diego Anido, a great friend and creator, says that what is reassuring, within the sometimes nervous dynamics of a rehearsal process, is thinking that, of that work, nothing will be left after a few years. It's true: eventually it will disappear from the stage and the audience's memory. And perhaps the idea of failure as the thematic driving force behind our plays that, in a certain way, I also like to think that that rehearsal, that time, that emotional and economic investment, will end up in oblivion, without leaving any physical trace. Alleluyah.

We, the Agrupación Señor Serrano are a team that maintain ourselves financially, by showing what we create. We do not work with texts from other authors, we don't do covers, we don't create from ready-made bases. We maintain ourselves through what we create, therefore it wouldn't seem fair to me that somebody, without our consent, made a profit from our work.

I support common rights in most of their variants, but I think that the key lies in the fact that it is the author who has to choose how to position his creation in relation to these rights and not the consumer, making whatever use of them he pleases.

We are now touring six plays. Four by the Agrupación Señor Serrano and two from

the Colectivo Un Poco Animal formed by Ester Forment, Sebastián García Ferro and myself. Not only do we like to combine the creation of new plays and rehearsals with the tours, but the fact that the play is alive when premiered and then it is during the tour that it grows and develops fully. We live and finance new productions based on having a repertoire and "touring it". Currently over 70% of our income is coming from these tours. When we consume theatre we consume desire.

Societat Doctor Alonso

The word *consumption* consumes itself. ■

3 FRAGMENTS ON THE BODY OF THE AUDIENCE

Roger Bernat

The theatre is still the only place where the public is confronted with itself as a collective.

Anon. cited by J. Rancière, *The emancipated spectator* (2008)

Art is enjoyed more actively when one is seated. That is why you have been given seats. You are more warm-hearted when seated. You are more impressionable. You are more open. You are more tolerant. You are more resigned when seated. You are more democratic. You do not tire as much. Time does not drag on so much. You allow yourself to be overcome more easily. You suspend disbelief more readily. You lose yourself in the anonymity. You lose your self awareness. You become more malleable. You lose track of time. Standing you could act much better. It is the nature of the body that standing your shouts could be louder. You could better close your fists. You would be ruder, by force. Your enjoyment of the art would be diminished.

Peter Handke, *Public Insult* (1967)

Where is the spectator's body? The spectator is a little head in the darkness, with eyes and ears wide open, agog to be fed a performance, and mouth also wide open, like cattle in a shed. His body has been domesticated, bent and lastly seated. All of the gestures made by our bodies have been directed. At the theatre one only speaks, laughs, claps or yawns at the times and places devised for this end. The theatre has been a battlefield on which great wars were waged in the late nineteenth century to instill discipline in the audience, to focus its attention on one sole source of stimuli. In turning off the lights in the stalls and sinking the orchestra in a pit, Wagner paved the way for what would later become the cinema hall, television rooms and the uncountable screens

that seek our attention. One hundred years on from this Wagnerian reform we no longer need darkness and silence to concentrate on a single object, and yet the spectator's body is still stationed, proscribed to the theatre hall.

Notwithstanding, some preparatory work is necessary in order to forget the body. This preparation entails disciplinary education in which the child is made to be silent, sit still, concentrate on what the teacher is saying and pay attention to the blackboard or computer screen. Such an education trains future citizens to sacrifice their body to the jobs for which they qualify. Farm work did not require a school education to domesticate the body. In the industrial age, however, workers had to be able to subject their body to the machine or the office, and the school trained individuals to achieve this. Arguably then, the theoretical corpus offered to pupils over the course of their education is the bait with which parents are enticed to put their child in the hands of a school institution that will instruct them to sit in silence and pay attention.

The emergence of industry and new places of work went hand in hand with the birth of leisure. In the agricultural period free time was actually freer than in the industrial world with its set timetables, delimited pathways and specific spaces devoted to each type of activity. Leisure, labour's perfect correlate, was shaped according to the template of the latter: the need for trained spectators, fixed timetables and set venues. It is hard to envisage how art could succeed under such conditions – so often in need of redeeming and emancipating its spectators when much of dramatic literature is subject to the trap of its own means. Adventures such as those of Brecht and Artaud are signs of a backlash against the determinism of a history of theatre that was prisoner of its own desires. Dramatic art, following in the footsteps of education and labour institutions, built theatres to secure the audience's undivided attention and force the spectator to give up his body.



The history of how theatre buildings have come to be what they are now is an accurate reflection of the changes that our society has undergone in the last few centuries. It is no coincidence that one of the theatre architects' main concerns has been loyalty to their social backdrop and, in some cases, to speed up the social changes that were on the political horizon. In the space of just a few decades – the time it took to move from regimes that were to a greater or lesser extent totalitar-

ian into the democracies we know today – the thrust stage with its unequal visibility had given way to the egalitarian proscenium arch. Both put before us spectators without a body whose voice is only heard at the very end, in much the same way as our representative democracies in which the voice of the electorate is only heard after the four years of the term.



Perhaps we need only look to our personal experience to become mindful of the need to reclaim the body. Having spent 8, 10 or 12 hours sitting in front of the various screens present in our lives, the prospect of sitting in front of the screen created by the frame around the theatre stage is often dispiriting. Sport, on the other hand, which is the athletic reinstatement of the body, gives us an overly simplified image of the collective to which we belong. It is incumbent upon the theatre, a venue to which members of a community are called in order to recognise themselves as a group, to go back to its Dionysian heritage and put the spectator's body back on the stage. New technologies increasingly bring everything closer to us and social networks are the decorporalised version of the theatre space. Cities need to bring back public spaces for critical contact between their citizens. Such spaces cannot afford to dispense with the body – the original space of desire. A voice without body is no more than a vehicle of power. The presence of the body, and that of the spectator, is called for to temper the disproportionate multiplication of the word. ■

THE BREAKING OF THE MASK¹

Agustín García Calvo

The first thing to do is to break with some of the reigning confusion which I suppose you face with regard to what theatre is, and that, generally, they try to get you to pass it off as another kind of literature, a dramatic literature, ie something subject to writing. But this invention, this theatrical device is not itself subject to writing. To contrast theatre of letters, literary theatre, with what theatre really is, I would have to say that *theatre is dance*: it is dance: it has always been dance. It was born that way, and in distant places too; you have all heard of how blossomings and complications of theatrical dance originated in China, India, Bali, and then especially among our ancestors, in this corner of the globe that was destined to dominate the whole world, passing through the phases of Greece and Rome. Everywhere it has emerged as dance, and if theatre wants to be something other than mere lit-

erature, it has to 'constantly' remember this condition of "dance" which implies that there must be something that moves with a *rhythm* (like dance, more or less similar), in such a way that everything else – the plot, which among the ancients was called *mythos* (the myth that is the plot) – or the characters, situations and everything else, occur as though carried by these waves of a rhythm.

I think that the essential thing, with regard to theatre, is the play between two times: the "*time of performance*" and, in cases where there is a *mythos*, there is a plot, which is the usual thing, "*the time of what is performed*".

The "time of performance" is the time that is happening right *now*, when the performance is taking place; it is therefore a time in which – somehow – the actors are living, and also the audience, not just as individuals, but as something common to all. It is a time that, once the function is over, after the performance, can also be measured, and one finds that it measures, nearly always, an hour and a half: well, that is an exaggeration, but an exaggeration that makes some sense.

Among the ancients, you know that the theatrical performance, in the festivals of Dionysus – in Lenaia and others – lasted as long as the shortest day of the year: that is, about eight hours and it was a tetralogy: there were three tragedies and a satirical drama to top it all. So, if you reckon it up, you will see that this corresponds to each play being more or less what I say. And the idea that the length has to be an hour and a half or so, has carried on to this day. And the module caught on with cinema – as you know – where a normal film lasts ninety minutes, an hour and a half; and anything over or under is noted, precisely, as a slight defect or a slight excess. In other words, the measurement is calculated correctly. I will not, because today it does not affect us, go into the mystery of why, because you know that really a theatrical function could last anything: it did not necessarily need to last an hour and a half; and explaining this – not explaining it but going into it in depth – is not so easy: it has to do also with the very rhythm of dreams, which – as everyone knows – are intimately linked with this theatre thing, with this idea of the theatrical performance and its relationships and conflicts with waking reality.

This is in short what the time of the performance is: when something is performed – a plot – the "time of the performed" enters into play, and this, in contrast, can be many different things; it can be a day,

according to the classical unit, coinciding roughly with the time of the performance; it can be very separate from it, it can... it can be days: for example, it is assumed that Aeschylus's *The Persians*, with the defeat of Xerxes and the reaction of Xerxes and all that, lasts a few days, a typical example. Or the development of the adventure of Orestes, with the murder of Agamemnon, the flight with the Furies and so on, also takes at least a few days, an indefinite amount of time. Or it can go on for years: for example, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, we find that all the years of the tyranny of Macbeth, accompanied by Lady Macbeth, are compressed in the performance. (Shakespeare's plays are long, often double or triple: three hours or four and a half), but compressed in those four hours are many years of tyranny by Macbeth. And so you can continue imagining others, other modules of relationship, very different, between the time of the performance and the time of what is performed.

What matters to me is that you consider this: *theatre's little game* is right in this mechanism and contrast between the two times: the time that is happening right now, for the duration of the performance, which no one can catch, but later can be measured, and time of the performed as: relationship, opposition leading to a question right away, what is real, or what is most real. When someone is watching a performance and wonders "What is real time, this hour and a half that it lasts, or the days and months that what is depicted in the scene lasts?" he will find himself in a fix: the temptation will be to say that *the real is what is fictitious*, precisely, and that the representation is as though *forgotten or subsumed*.

This was a preliminary with regard to entering the *tragic devices and the mask*. It was necessary, because mistakes dominate in terms of what theatre is, and forgetting about this game between two conflicting times. I am stopping for a moment, in case anyone still has not grasped this well enough, or wants me to expand, before we continue.

(Someone asks about the "site" or "place" in the theatre, and the speaker answers)

I think there are three things, in what you are calling "place": three things: one thing is the stage set. the dimensions of a stage: this long stage that can still be seen at the theatre in Mérida, other forms of circular theatre or circus, all this is the place of representation. Then there is, around this, all the geographical reality. The people who come, the actors... This is the space of so-called "real" life, of everyday life,

where some citizens who have to travel to the theatre live, people who live in villages who have to go off to Madrid or to Mérida, to offer the performance...

(Someone asks: Is that the rite? And ACG responds)

No, no: "the rite" is the rite: all this is if you want – preliminary, it contributes to the thing going well or badly later, but of course, it is not the rite. This is exterior, it refers to the geographical, social, family, reality, of people who will come; also of the puppeteers themselves who move from one city to another, with all their belongings, for the performance, all these are things which are obviously linked to, but do not, can not enter the mechanism I mentioned, of combat between the performance and the performed.

Another "place", which is what I have previously submitted with respect to time, if being fictional, it is precisely real, is the court of Denmark which is where Hamlet was wandering, or that of Thebes where the Seven are fighting against Thebes; these are places, and fictitious places, in some ways, being fictional (as I said the time), intended to be real. There are three different things: When you go to the theatre, people go as a person: if the theatre – the rite, dance theatre – goes well, that audience had to experience, during the performance, something wonderful, that changed it from a set of people into something else, and it is this to which the actors and the very performing arts themselves must contribute.

Let us now turn to the *tragic devices*: you must specify tragic, because the term has become a commonplace: it is a rhetorical, literary term, but has been successful and now speaks of "tragedy" when it means "a disaster", anything more or less terrible or unpleasant, and of course that's not the proper sense of tragedy. Among the tragic devices, of which there are many, I will focus here on only one, around which the explanation will continue to revolve. This device is that of the conflict: *conflict: shock*. As we will see, this is a conflict between two kinds of law: a law inconsistent with another law: I will not define "law", I suppose you will understand what I mean as we proceed.

A conflict between two types of law, that force a decision: either one or the other. And these two types of law fall on one person, one character: on the same character, the two laws, and the need to choose; that is a need which, when real tragedy takes place, it is impossible to fulfill: irreconcilable with the reality itself (fictional) of the

character. That is what it will end up doing, in some way: breaking the mask, which – as you know – means nothing any more than the breaking of the masks you know, anything that will eventually be done, somehow, to break the mask, which, as you know, does not mean anything other than "person", as our term; (I suppose you know it all) is a loan that the Latinos took through the Etruscans, from Greek *prosopon*, which precisely means "mask", so that, in a very eloquent, that the "person" so pervasive everywhere among us, comes from theatre comes from the mask.

The conflict, impossible, but necessary, has to end up breaking the mask, in other words, *breaking the person*, and what I am saying to you in general can happen in many specific ways, but certainly I think that is the key, so that one can say that there actually is "*tragedy*".

Of course, the conflict between two laws, and the need to choose, forcibly, can be solved also in reverse: it can be solved by laughter: this contrary possibility should be noted, but is not the one we are examining here. It can be solved by laughter: for example, in *The Acharnians* by Aristophanes, there is a scene in which Dicaeopolis, tired of the war, has decided to set up his own free market, where the different merchants from the Greek villages can go to sell their goods and a poor, starving man from Megara attends, accompanied by two no-less starving daughters, and then he poses the problem on the stage and has decided to dress the girls up and sell them as piglets in the market that the other character has opened; and he asks the girls: "What would you prefer, for me to sell you as piglets or to continue being very hungry?" and the girls respond "We want to be sold, we want to be sold." Thus, at that point in *The Acharnians*, the conflict is resolved by laughter: the pathos of parental and family love and the hunger of the war and post-war, the two things that enter into conflict resolve their contradictions comically, with laughter. Or, without going any further, the situation that arises in those popular verses that many of you may know:

*If you see your house burning
and in your ass a hornet's nest
and your wife with a friar
Where do you go first?*

In this case it is triple, but that puts the person before "your house", "your ass", "your wife": they refer to the same person, one assumes – and place this person under duress to choose: a duress accompanied by time (the urgency of time is very good). The conflict also arises between laws, the need to choose: this can be

resolved with the other theatrical art: it can be solved comically, with comedy.

But here we are interested in the situation where the conflict between the two laws leads to unbearable ripping apart of the person, of the character, and therefore of the mask. This is what I invite you to consider as "tragic": what is implied by the r i p p i n g a p a r t : the ripping apart of the person.

I will remind you of a few examples of ancient tragedies we all know, so that all this becomes more intelligible:

I would remind you firstly of Agamemnon at Aulis, ie, forced to sacrifice Iphigenia, or *Iphianassa*, because that is the only way that the gods grant favorable winds to go against Troy. That is why he has to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia, and sacrifice her by his own [hand.] The fulfilling of this, in Lucretius, for example, in his diatribe against religion, becomes a serious argument: That was what religion led to, what religion was for, Lucretius cries, remembering Agamemnon sacrificing ... sacrificing Iphigenia. But all this is a subsequent reaction. Now we are at the moment of the tragedy. Agamemnon is required, first, to be king – or *anaxandron* – chief of the army, and comply with them, and fulfill the military and political mission which leads him against the east. This law weighs down on him. Moreover he has to be a father, and furthermore the father of a daughter, the father of a tender daughter, with all the tender family ties: and he has those too. Behold: a case of the influence of two laws on the same person, and there you have the ripping apart: however the conflict is resolved, it will always be disastrous: it will lead to death or it will lead to insanity or other forms of ripping apart, but will never be reconciled with reality: when tragedies end in reconciliation (everybody knows), they are lost: for example, in the trilogy that we still have left, in *The Oresteia*, conciliation provides the ending for *The Eumenides*: this, of course, goes against what I am presenting to you as essential in tragedy.

I present to you another case of conflict: there you have Antigone, after the death of Polynices at the site of Thebes, and Antigone, torn between two laws: there is a law, which is the written law, the law constituting the State of Thebes: this is the new, most recent law, however, it is the law incorporating Creon, the uncle of Antigone and the king; and, against this law, which effectively means not burying the enemy, which has attacked the State, the Polis, is what Antigone herself recognises as an unwritten law, a *nómos ágraphos*, which obviously is older: it is the

law governing burying the deceased of one's own blood, which is much older, it predates writing, but in tragedy it is precisely Antigone, the young woman, who recognises it. And hence the situation of "the ripping apart of Antigone", however it ends (according to the tragedy), and the indecisiveness of her sister Ismena – at the side of Antigone – the indecisiveness between one and the other, are, for my purpose, revealing: this is where the conflict is also demonstrated, again, between two types of law, one old and one new, and the division that this has to bring.

Another example: Orestes after completing the operation to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, you will remember, in the *Agamemnon*, that this involved the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, his wife, and Aegisthus, her lover; Orestes comes next, and has to deal with these two laws: first, Orestes has to be the avenger of the father. This is elementary: it is a type of law. He must avenge his father, killed by the usurper; by the usurper and his own mother: he has to kill his mother. And then, as Orestes kills his mother, with the same blow with which he kills her, he is breaking both laws: he is avenging. He is avenging his father, but the Furies appear immediately, they will pursue him, and they are the Furies sent by his mother, a mother murdered by her son. The obligation ... the obligation to avenge his father has been accomplished at the expense of the emergence of the mother's Furies from the other world, they are going to pursue him: therefore you have, I suppose, in Orestes, another good example of the two laws at issue with each other, falling on one person and tearing them apart.

We can go to another level: here you have the case of Prometheus: it seems that we are leaving behind the human characters now, but the law of tragedy that I am telling you about continues to govern the same: Prometheus is effectively a Titan, i.e. a child of the Earth. And there, then, at the moment of opposition between Prometheus against the new king, or tyrant, of gods and men, Zeus, there is a clear contrast between two laws: the old law is the law of the sons of the Earth, which, curiously, brings the compassion of the *thnetoi, brotoi*: of the mortals, of "those facing death"; this is the law that, on the one hand, is alive in Prometheus and will force him to face the new law, the Olympian law, the law of Zeus, the new State of Zeus, the law of mortals and immortals alike. That is the conflict that will tear this giant that appears on the scene of *Prometheus Bound* and ends precisely with the fulfilment and breakage of this huge artifice of this giant that is Prometheus.

Yet another example that you have, well illustrated, is in *The Bacchae* of Euripides. Aeschylus had also written a *Lycurgeia*, referring to another character – Lycurgus – of a similar fate. But we have *The Bacchae*, one of the tragedies that still works best among us, in which you once again meet the king, Pentheus, and, of course, the king, ie the representative of the social order in Thebes: he is the king of the city's social order. On the other hand, the new god has entered the city – Dionysus – Bacchus-Dionysus entered, which is winning the souls of citizens and especially of the women: among them, the mother of Pentheus: Agave. And I suppose you all remember the tragedy: Pentheus has to oppose the new god, and to oppose the new god, has to oppose firstly all the women in his kingdom and his mother, who is already addicted: a faithful follower of the new religion. That is the conflict of laws, and in the case of Pentheus it occurs. I could say, not playing much with words, that one of the laws is that of the *status* – of the State – and the other is the law of *ékstasis*, ie of just getting out of oneself, which is representing the Dionysian inebriation that attracted these men and women: those are the two coming together over him. You know that in Euripides' tragedy he ends up torn, confused with a deer – torn – at the hands of his own mother; therefore compliance is precisely what one could expect of all this.

Incidentally, I remind you that we can also jump to the reality of the makers of tragedies, for example, to the reality of Euripides, and of course note that a manufacturer of tragedies, like anyone else, is bound also to be subjected to contradictory laws, and suffer from tearing: for Euripides everything is very clear: in some of the passages he praises and longs for happiness (presumably) of those who believe and those who still believe in the gods (whose company Euripides, raised between sophists and all that, should have left behind long ago), so that, on the one hand, he cannot help but feel that longing, that praise, of the holy happiness of those who believe in the gods; however, on the other hand, he has already known that is a lie: it has known that all that piety was founded on a lie: he has launched a search of the mystery by means of reason (which is one thing that some of us devote ourselves to from time to time, and which of course has a major tragic element itself). In search of the mystery by means of reason, through reason.

Well, I referred to ancient theatre, but of course, to the extent that theatre continues living, like dance, like a game between the "time of the performance" and the

“time of the performed”, this may refer to many other situations: the very situation of Hamlet, which you will all remember very well, is a typical situation of conflict, of conflict between laws, which forces him to make decisions, which develops within him a resistance to making them, and which therefore makes them even more painful. As if they could not be made for less: more bitter.

In *La Celestina*, Celestina on the one hand has to serve money: that is why she is there: she is there to sell: the sale of women's love; but moreover she serves love: it cannot be forgotten how she is stirring with her hands Pármeno and Areusa; when she takes him to go to bed with Areusa that night: without interest, at the start: she is serving love. And serving love and money at the same time cannot be: Celestina has to end badly. That is, only someone who has turned love into money can be saved from being torn: then there is no problem: if love has been turned into money, through prostitution, marriage or whatever, there is no longer any problem: you can live for many years and without being torn apart. But if both things are served intensively, things end badly, like Celestina, who also perished just for this reason. Take note that when Celestina serves love and serves money, she must somehow be aware of the contradiction: there is a scene in which she invokes the devil, she invokes it and is invoking with it, precisely, the demon of contradiction: the spirit of contradiction; which is something that we are referring to here constantly.

So: the two laws enter into conflict, when clashing in a single person, they reveal the vanity, the nonsense of the law in general. I guess it will seem a bit too bold to say “the law” straight out, but I have no choice but to insist on this: it is thus: when presented with all their strength on stage, two laws, that contradict one another, the result can be nothing but an appearance, at least a hint, discovery of vanity, meaninglessness, the law in itself: whichever it is.

This is a result that occurs when the coincidence of both, the coincidence of the conflict on a single person, carries with it the tearing up of that person. How so? Well, simply because the person was constituted by the law: you all: you and I myself, at times, suffer from many illusions regarding the “person”: i.e., with respect to this thing about the real “mask”, which occurs, not only in theatre, but in people in ordinary life: we have many illusions about the personal intimacy of each individual, with respect to personal liberty: a vain illusion, a bloody

deception upon which the deadliest of regimes is founded, which is that of democracy: death of the people: a deception for personal freedom and so many other things: “Everyone is free to do what he wants”: a lie: it's not true. The person is constituted as the document of identity that the police ask you for: it is constituted by the law. It is a social fact, it's an apparition – the very person, that mask, is an apparition of the law.

That is why it is so important that “the person” may be “guilty” so that he can take the “blame”: this word is, for our purposes, very interesting: there is a Greek word, *aitia*, which means indifferently “guilt” “cause”, and more, and for our purposes of constitution of the person and their tearing apart, it is very important. As I said it seems that my saint, “*Felix culpa*”, when he believed (he was a believer of the person, the personality, St. Augustine) when he said this he completely realised how blame is constituent: if a person is not to blame, then it is very doubtful whether he is a person: to be a proper person, we must be able to be guilty, if there is no guilt, no. Guilt constitutes. And it is very important that this guilt, which seems to be a social thing, is moved easily to be a “cause”: “physical cause”. We do not have time to stop in this transfer and discover how conception in the science of a constituting cause ends up being dissolved under the free reasoning that can be dedicated to it, but for the moment it reigns: the idea of cause in physics reigns because blame has to continue reigning, the notion of blame in society. One is made to sustain the other.

This is the status of “the person”: it is made by law. Far from the hopes that the personal individual can oppose the institutions, the State, the Capital, it would be necessary to strip oneself of all these hopes and recognize that the person is made by and constituted by the law. For this reason, when it happens, when a law collides with another, in the tragic moment, you discover the vanity of the law – guilt, cause – that governed everything, that is tragic for the person, in which that conflict occurs: it ends up deconstituted, having to attend one law or another, trying to attend one or the other, but in either case, doing just as badly: forced to choose where it cannot choose, the discovery of the law's falsity leaves it naked.

Let's look at what is naked. One ends up stripped bare of one's person, in other words, of one's mask: the mask that has been broken in the conflict of laws. It is stripped bare of its person, its naked person, which is, on stage, the mask of the

character, which is, in real life, this theatre mask, poorly made and clumsy, which is the real life that we bring: which actually differs from the other in how poorly made it is; in that it is made without rhythm (game with time) and without all the resources that the theatrical art imprints upon the production of a play. But in some sense one can say “theatre”, only that it is poorly done: arrhythmic, poorly dramatized, but theatre. Breakage also of this mask in this poorly done theatre of reality. And so, one wonders what is left, when the mask is broken, and that is what theatre helps us with, like nothing else: when the character breaks down, on stage, what remains is the actor: the actor is stripped naked.

But note well that *the actor is nobody*: there is no real person. This is very important, because major mistakes are made about this, against which I would like to speak. If a defence by the character, a defence of his mask (in the theatre as in real life), progresses to the discovery, that the person was a lie, that he was nothing that he thought it was. That progress is given, as you know, in a particularly clear way in *Oedipus Rex*: when the discovery is already becoming clear to the audience, before *Oedipus*, as soon as *Jocasta* has discovered this, she has to say, as in the verse by *Sophocles*: Oh, unfortunate wretch! You never know who you are! You never know who you are! This is the follow-on to this progress towards the discovery of the falsity of the person. There is resistance, but the tragedy is the rupture, which can not fail to reveal him. What is uncovered, since the person was real. It is revealed, what remains naked is, evidently, the unknown, something not exactly real. Previously I mentioned it with the name of “the actor”: the naked actor. But as I said: as long as the actor is a good actor, and a *good actor is an actor who is nobody*. All of you that have contact with the theatre ought to remember this well: here is where theatre is essentially distinguished from the cinema, and therefore from the novel. There is nothing more counter-theatrical, more horrible for the theatre, than when it turns out, when producing whatever (e.g. in the cinematographic adventure), that underneath there is still a *Humphrey Bogart*, or a *Maria Callas*: when these horrors happen that normally happen in film and in much poor theatre, then there is nothing of the game I'm talking about: the status of a theatrical actor who is nobody: if the actor still exists, such as *Humphrey Bogart* or *Maria Callas*, then, this is no actor, it is just another person. This should give you a good understanding of why the recommendations for doing Brechtian theatre particularly stressed non-identification

with the character: he felt, although he never said it so clearly, that the actor is nobody, and that an actor who identifies with the character is the same as the actor who identifies with their name on the poster outside, or who is interviewed on television. He is no longer worthy as a stage actor: there can be no “person”: there can be no “mask”. The actor is acting, and the person acting is nobody: this is the mystery, the discovery of nudity. That ... the person acting is not... is nobody, and precisely that nobody, that real nobody, but that is acting – precisely what is discovered with the breaking of the mask.

The conflict that I have just mentioned, putting it on stage, between characters and actor, at the same time has to be moved opposite: to the audience – somehow. The conflict, really unsolvable, the conflict between two laws that are opposed to each other, the breaking of the mask, the breaking of the person, the discovery of the unknown, has to be transferred to the audience if the theatrical performance is going well. Because the audience, in turn, are – as we said previously – people with their identity cards, with their income, social security, all those things that make a person; and who have bought a ticket to go to the theatre, aren't they? They are people: but if the thing goes well, inside, the same thing happens with the audience as with the actor: in the discovery they are no longer a “person”: for a moment the personal situation has vanished, has been shelved, and what remains is what – in that group of people – there was truly in common: *xunon*, *koinon* are the names – “common”, “public” – used among the ancients. It is discovered that what there was of that thing that does not exist, but what there is, which is people; and the discovery may be reached by the theatre: discovery of the vanity of the law of power (this a person cannot do: a person is made by power, it is at its service), but what remains to us of people, what remains to us of the common, which may wake up to the tragedy, that may discover the falsity of the law of power: even if only for a moment. This relates, of course, with that thing, which has had such poor success: the catharsis of Aristotle, the “cleansing”: it indeed, above all, a liberation, even if only for a moment: of the person: liberation of the individual. That's the opposite meaning with which I present here the much resorted to and falsified catharsis.

And I would like to finish reminding you of how this is linked with the issue of the struggle between two times, with which I started to entertain you this evening: the

conflict is between, on the one hand, what really is and really acts, which is “the actor who is nobody” and against him, “people” – real people, i.e. fictitious of the... of the performed. That is the conflict. And that coincides with the *conflict between the times*: obviously, the time that is passing now, for example, the time that is passing during this while that I am talking to you right now. No one can take it, this is the real time, which does not exist: the time that is happening now is true time, and this is the time of the performance. Never mind that we find that it is ending and that it can be measured as an hour and a half: this does not affect the fact that now, while I am speaking to you and you are hearing me, it is impossible to catch this time that is passing: it is impossible. This is the time that plays against the time performed, the time of any tragic plot, is no more than a kind of imitation, perfected, of time in real life. The time of the performance is real time, and therefore false time: as false as the laws. It is real time and false time; and goes against this, against what is contrasted by the time really passing, the time of performance, well done, rhythmic, of the play that is being acted by the actor, which strips bare of the person, to discover that being nobody and dragging the audience towards a *stripping of people*, to again become “the people”, a people that does not exist but that is there, discovery of the unknown.

That's the way I wanted us to learn how to understand this role of the theatre, and with this for the time being I am satisfied. (And he continued his conversation with the audience and actors)

Conference held in Seville on March 22, 2004 on the occasion of the Meetings of Classical Theatre.

1. Conference talk given in dialogue with those attending.
2. The author's peculiar spelling, faithful to the phonetics of speech, is respected. ■

SERGI FÁUSTINO

MUSIC AND CONTRADICTION

Carlota and Victor asked me to write something for DDT and I no longer know what to talk about. In previous issues I have written a text, answered a questionnaire, or they gave me a lengthy interview... and I feel that everything has been said.

We held a meeting, I explained the project for this year's show, and while we reviewed what I had done in previous years, I realized that I'm doing a show about a subject

that appears in almost all of my pieces. Sometimes in a central role and others tangentially, but it always appears: music. And it's funny, because I feel that my interest in the music of my everyday life has been declining over time, but if I review my works I realise that no, it has always been there. In each production, during the months of rehearsals, we talked and even argued a lot about music, even when it wasn't the issue concerning us. So, if I stop to think, it's not that my interest in music has waned, but that the way I relate to it has changed, just as the access to it and the format has changed. I think it is not a matter of whether or not I want it, it is simply thus: music is important to me. Music and all its soundwaves, which in some cases are more interesting than the music itself.

Maybe this mistaken feeling of lack of interest comes because I identify the fact that music is important to me with the figure of the “expert”, that particularly obnoxious character who believes that, simply because he has a large number of records, he is above good and evil, and forms part of a higher class of people, almost a breed; that figure who self-awards himself the title that he *knows a bit* about music. *Knowing a bit*, about music. What does *rubbish a bit*, about music, mean? What *rubbish...* and before they still had the financial excuse: the more money, the more albums, and the more albums, the more you knew. But now that the access is practically universal, everyone can enjoy the music that they want. And that is brilliant. Even if only to overturn stupid elitisms. Today, if you are interested, you can study any style of music in depth. It just depends on whether you want to make a hole an inch wide or whether you want to end up dying of heat because you're getting close to the centre of the Earth. You choose.

And we reach the first contradiction: there are many people interested in music that are against digital formats. Now we will not get into this subject, I simply wanted to highlight this first contradiction because throughout this text we will find more, and I am starting to believe that it is a term that can not be separated from music. But we will discuss it later, now back to the rubbish about *knowing a bit* about music. Nobody knows about music. Or everyone knows about it. Music is abstract, it is sounds, and therefore, nobody can say that a sequence of sounds is better than another. Music enters through the ear (and sometimes not even the ear, it enters our breast or our pores), and connects the brain in an irrational way, that is why we relate certain songs with memories or experiences. These connections can not

be quantified, no one can say that their experiences related to music are better than those of other people. It is precisely this abstract quality that makes music be what you want it to be, and here is its strength, its universality and the idea that has led to the creation of the show that we will do this year.

However, one thing is universal access and a very different thing is the importance you attach to music in your life. If you produce a scale of values of things that are important in your life and put music at number 28, it is very different from if you put it at number 3. Whoever puts it at 28 will make a hole in the earth an inch wide, and the person who puts it in 3rd position will take a pick-axe and start hacking like a Trojan, destroy his back, get filthy from dirt and mud, sweat like a fish as he approaches the centre of the Earth, with the added danger that, if he is sidetracked and the music advances in his personal ranking, reaching 1st position, ahead of love and friendship, it will mean that he will have got too close to the incandescent centre of the Earth and will have got burned.

What do I mean by all that? Well, that devoting oneself to music *seriously* is very tiring. And that it looks very good when we see someone putting on records and producing a good session, but that having reached there has meant time, effort and dedication. So, *respect*.

Another contradiction: the first person with whom I have contacted for the piece is someone who *knows a bit*, a *connoisseur* – as he himself rightly says, using the English word *expert* – Kiko Amat. Well, maybe here I should explain the tag I have hung on him. Kiko is someone who lives for music, he is someone who has put music at the heart of his life and is dedicated to revolving around it as if one of the 4,000 vinyl records weighing down the shelves of his home. The Kiko is the person who always sweats because he is constantly getting very close to the centre of the earth to get a disk or a particular book. For Kiko music is the fourth most important thing in life, after his wife and two sons. Kiko writes about music, reads about music, watches films about music and becomes a sponge which absorbs everything that is related to the music that he likes. And he is from Sant Boi. And he is a mod, although he says he is only a little bit so.

More contradictions: when we first met up and I explained the project to him, I talked about a live band playing a series of songs live and whether he would want to write some texts that would explain the historical contexts of the era and the conditions and peculiarities of the creators. In other

words I, the *hippie* advocate of the universality of music and each person having a strictly personal relationship not transferable to the music, when I arrange to meet the connoisseur, the eminence of Sant Boi, I put myself in the skin of the *expert* that I hate so much and talk to him about objective data, about the musical knowledge that can be quantified, inventoried and even examined. Fortunately, Kiko is a guy with a bit of common sense and he very elegantly told me that he would rather write about songs and about what they make him feel. Besides, he also told me that he is writing a book about what we are talking about. About *his* songs.

And now we take a leap forward in time. We are at the bar La Hacienda, a little oasis in the centre without foreign tourists. We are sitting at a marble table, two beers, the walls lined with wood. Today there are no *boixos nois* but near the window it is bitterly cold. Kiko has already finished his book and tells me that, of all the books he has written, this is the one that has generated most doubts in him. Contradictions. Because he wrote from passion and because he cannot nor does he want to talk about music from the cold and cerebral analysis used by most music critics. And of course, speaking with passion means letting oneself get carried away by tunes and words that combined, transport you to places you never explored and place you in unique and in some cases, contrary positions – it sounds familiar – such as for example making a praise of the dictator and their loutishness then twenty pages later again praising Allison Staton and Spike and their “pop dynamics derived from intelligence”. Is it a contradiction? Maybe. But I prefer a thousand contradictions such as this to a five-hundred-page treatise about the repercussion of the music of Manu Chao in the anti-globalization movement in Barcelona.

WARNING: Everything that follows has nothing to do with Mr. Kiko Amat. Make it clear that nobody has the slightest intention or associate terms like “black-metal”, “Dyango” or “electro”, with its honorable person.

So far I have been talking about the show that we will do. Now *my* part begins. From here on in I talk about *my* music, why I like what I like, what it gives me, what it generates in me, what it stirs within me, what it causes in me and what changes this music triggers in my person. And I will be passionate, because it can not be otherwise. And I will be contradictory because it cannot be otherwise. And someone will take it in jest, someone will not understand it. Someone will say that it

is “*nonsense and a lack of respect*”. And I will say that it is, simply, *sincere*.

To talk about music, *my* music and all its contradictions, of which there are a few, I have scrounged from Kiko the structure that he used for his latest book – about which he has doubts and which I think is very good. This is a kind of small-scale copy and bridging gaps. The idea is to take a song and starting from there, talk about everything that it generates within me. Music maestro!

“Hvis lyset tar oss” BURZUM

The album that marked my life most was *Show No Mercy* by Slayer. Until that point, I listened to The Cure, U2, El Último de la Fila, Radio Futura... my secondary school days. One day, I do not know how, a tape recorded by the school heavy rocker fell into my hands (in those days there was always one – or more – heavy rockers at every school). I put it into my Walkman and a large door opened. I still have memories of walks, trips from the house to the station, or returning home from a friend's house, when I was listening to this tape. I directly became attached to thrash-metal, skipping heavy, because heavy never convinced me totally as it was too soft. I did like the odd group, but generally I preferred thrash. And from thrash-metal to death metal. And from death-metal to grind-core. And no, I will not now explain-define styles, but let us say, for understanding's sake, that the noise level was growing exponentially.

With the secondary school heavy rocker and a few others, we got fond of concerts and went to see everything: Sepultura, Deicide, Carcass, Atrocity (the Germans), Ratos de Porao, Slayer, Testament, Napalm Death, Megadeth, Suicidal Tendencies, etc. and it was precisely the latter who formed the bridge. Suicidal Tendencies and DRI, who did what was called *thrash-hard* or a mix between thrash metal and hardcore, became the bridge from which I moved from the riverbank of hardcore. From there on I started getting interested in hardcore and starting leaving to one side everything that bore the suffix “metal” to enter the neverending world of punk. But it should be said that I have never renounced metal and continue to view it with affection.

All this collection of “deaths”, “grinds” and “thrashes” to say that I did not get as far as black metal, which would have been the most natural step, indeed it was the next step following death, but, as I said, I found myself at a crossroads and the devil lost that time because I chose to go in the direction of hardcore and punk. Overall, a few years passed, I was quite distanced

from the hardcore / punk scene and a book called *Gods of Chaos* landed in my hands. It talks about the black-metal phenomenon in northern Europe. I had a certain interest in that because I knew there had been some mess but I didn't know exactly what had happened. There was something that smelled rotten in Scandinavia and I wanted to know what it was. Firstly my curiosity was aroused by the aesthetics, especially the fact that they painted their faces. A custom that started with an attempt to reproduce the human skull in the Misfits or early Celtic Frost style, and was degenerating into a kind of Dorian Grey type competition but reversed, to see who could paint the most brilliant design that would reflect all the evil he bore inside. The result was very complicated designs that, to be made, needed much more time than required by a classical dancer to make up before going on stage. Now, however, the *black* metal lot were the most evil, the most brutal and the most extreme. Another major contradiction worthy of raising all my interest.

And apart from the paintings, indeed, there had been a mess, and a big one. In summary (because I will not start explaining the whole book here): several boys aged 16 and 17 began meddling with Satanism, weapons and violence. Everything happens in Norway, a very peaceful society where almost nothing ever happens. The boys form a few groups and start playing a music they call *black metal* in reference to a song by Venom and to everything that is bad and can be related to the colour black. They feel hatred for everything, but especially toward Christianity, and demand a return to Nordic mythology. They go wild and start burning churches. The police are lost because they could not imagine the culprits being 17-year-old boys. One of them kills a guy who tries to make advances on him in a cruising area on the outskirts of Lillehammer, and owing to a series of coincidences, nobody sees it. He returns to Oslo and tells his mates. The police search for the killer in the gay circles of Lillehammer, do not find him and close the case. All the young people from the Oslo *black* scene know that the Bard “Faust” Eithurn is the killer of the Lillehammer man but the police are lost than a blind man in a shootout. They continue to burn churches, some of which are wooden gems from the sixteenth century, such as that of Fantoft. It must be said that in Norway the churches are made of wood, so that made it easier for our colleagues of the Tragic Week, who had to improve their technique to adapt to the difficulty of burning churches made of stone. The two most prominent characters in the scene (Euronymous and Count

Grishnack) are fighting, and Varg Vikernes (Count Grishnack) ends up killing Øystein Årseth (Euronymous) in a bad way. The police pick him up and discover everything: the killing and burning of churches. Trials and major surprise from a Norwegian society that wonders how anything like that could have happened and how they took so long to realize.

Among all this madness, music is the catalyst, but beware, that it is one thing to be the catalyst and another to be the culprit. The music is not guilty of anything. If we want to find the guilty party perhaps we will have to analyse sociologically a self-repressed Calvinist society where the state is far above the individual in a brutally paternalistic way, and a society that creates some taboos, such as, for example, firearms on television – that make young people react praising everything that is forbidden.

But as I said, this is a job that we will leave to the sociologists, what captivates me is how music plays a unifying role, and as a group of young people use it to express all their discontent. In fact, if someone had stopped to listen to what they were saying, perhaps could have been avoided or at least the how, what and why of everything be understood. It's funny how music brings together a number of people who have similar feelings, the result of living in a specific context and how this union which is musical initially, transcends and becomes a social phenomenon of explosive characteristics. I suppose it will be due to the attraction of the dissemination that music can have, but it is not only that because there were many groups that refused to play live and defended small record companies and self-control of the dissemination. There is something else that does not appear. It is not so simple. If they were only looking for the dissemination of their ideas they would not crap on the English *black* groups which played with keyboards in Jean-Michel Jarre style and signed with major record labels. I think it is rather the subconscious connection which we talked about earlier, that specific quality of music that is beyond reason and that makes feel empathy towards another person just because they share the same musical tastes. I think that this characteristic may have contributed to creating links between the disenfranchised youths of Norway. But, I repeat, the music is not the cause or origin. Music has the ability to unite and this ability is neither good nor bad per se. Everything will depend on the use thereof, of this union. Some people – make use of music in churches as a bond of union with other people who also think that homosexuality is a disease and degeneration, and there are others who use music as a link between those who practice the sport of

setting bonfires at churches. Whose fault is it? The music? No. The blame is the broken mind of a few.

It is precisely this connection with the subconscious that when I hear the “Hvis lyset tar oss” of Burzum, may make me receive a unique feeling of anger and despair, an existential angst expressed in cries, the sound of guitars that will stick in the skin like glass tops and a steamroller drum passes over you and does not leave a single whole bone. I read an interview with Vikernes (Burzum was alone, playing all the instruments) in which he explained that to achieve that unique sound, he used the worst music equipment he could find because the sound was dirty, ugly, evil and dark, and therefore he was looking for more bad equipment and instruments to better achieve the sound being sought. As you can see, a position taken to its logical conclusions, given the fact that believing it deeply, which results in an authenticity, a truth, it is very hard to find that note when we hear his music.

But not everything could be so beautiful and here comes the next contradiction, and one of the big ones. The evolution of Mr. Cristian Vikernes, aka Varg Quisling Vikernes “Count Grishnack” was: *pro-black-metal*, satanist, defence of the ancient Viking culture with its tall blond gods with blue eyes, and here, how could it be otherwise, the supremacist theories, racism, nazism and all the dodgy -isms that exist. And that very same deep-down belief, which also gave rise to an abominable man who wrote an abominable book and had an equally abominable activity in supremacist circles in northern Europe.

And how do I position myself now, regarding the first three records by Burzum? Discs that are black metal masterpieces and are prior to the ultra-fascist drift of Vikernes Lumberas? Well I must say that I like the music. Those three albums I like and when I hear them they still impress me but the guy is a son of a bitch and a cretin but his music is glory, it has overcome him, it has transcended him. And I'm sorry, but I cannot do anything, and while I am writing this, I feel as though my insides were being stripped out, and I don't want to see this but I have no more choice: Burzum is by far the best thing ever done within the black metal scene. It is thus. And it is an ever made in the black. So. And it is a bugger having to accept this but it is not the first time it has happened, it also happened to Celine and the art world has a few more examples.

And if that were not contradiction enough, something similar has happened to me with some other style of music and I reacted the other way around: I have put first the personality ahead of the rotten musi-

cian and this has negatively affected the perception of his music. For example (in this case it has nothing to do with the Nazi theme), when I read that Paul Weller, tyrant-style, made the life of the other two members of The Jam impossible. I took a dislike to him, since then I really couldn't stand him, and I cannot say that I do not like The Jam because *In the City* and in general, everything they did was very good, good, but I was never able to look at them in the same way again. As we said, music cannot be separated from the contradictions and when they come, they come.

“Waiting for a train” JIMMIE RODGERS

Jimmie Rodgers. Early 1900s. A guy who worked breaking up stone and laying railroads in the southern United States. He died at 36 of tuberculosis from all the dust he had swallowed. A guy who sang about his day and what was happening around him. Sad songs about hard lives. A guy that in all his songs – except for three – said: “*yodel-ehi-ho de-lehi-oh deli-dele-hi*”. One moment. Are we are talking about yodelling?

Are we talking about what the inhabitants of the Alps sing, dressed in twisted suede shorts, thick socks to just below the knee and pitchers of beer in their hands, in an atmosphere of unbridled joy and red faces? Yes. We are talking about it. The great Jimmie Rodgers sang sad songs, about sad lives, his guitar and yodelling. And it is spectacular how something as cheerful by nature as yodelling becomes a deep sorrow. This paradox of taking something in principle happy, like yodelling, and immersing it in an old blues song by turning it into a sad lament which caught me and took me to ask how the hell the Yodelling Alps reached the Mississippi Delta. And it seems that everything has an explanation.

Initially, yodelling – now I am going to put myself in the role of the expert that I hate so much. Me! Contradiction. There were already five and “and let’s go for bingo!” is considered a cry for communicating between the shepherds of the Alps which, in logical evolution, became part of folklore of the area. Often the groups that performed these songs were made up of members of one family, I guess that was probably due to the difficulty of rehearsing (too much snow and too many slopes), and the strong musical tradition in countries such as Austria, Germany or Switzerland, where it is very normal that each member of the family knows how to play an instrument. Now we take a leap in space and time.

In the early 1700s, a series of religious communities began arriving in the United States, the most important being the Mennonites, the Amish, the Tunker church (the brethren) and Moravia, who had suf-

fered religious persecution in southern Europe. It would not be surprising that among the communities that came from southern Germany and Switzerland, there were few yodelers and these continued singing their songs to remember their homeland. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century the waves of German and Swiss immigrants continued to arrive and expand to the point where, in the mid-1800s, there were so many people of Germanic origin living in United States that began to be a proliferation of concerts and tours of Swiss and German families who played traditional music of the Alps. Often, the performances were part of shows that were in the villages which also involved comedians with their faces painted black, magicians, merchants of elixirs and musicians who played traditional folk music from other countries like Scotland or Ireland. It is not difficult to imagine a group that reaches a village, one of the musicians falls ill and they find someone among the village people to replace him. And so, the mixing begins. And thus the Yodel enters up to the roots in North American folk music.

Anyway, it is not so easy. I started explaining the origins of yodelling writing “in principle” because it is not so clear that the origin is the Alps, even a cry to communicate between the mountains. It was always believed that yodelling came from the Tyrol area; in fact, studies were even done that analysed the sound waves of the yodelling, reaching the conclusion that it represented the profile of the mountains of the Alps, the first inhabitants of Central Africa (7000 BC yes, yes, BC), who have a way of singing that technically, is the same as Alpine yodelling. Nor that they live on a flat land, without a single mountain. Moreover, this was one of the areas where slaves were taken from to bring them to the United States. So it is not strange to imagine some of these pygmy turned into slaves, singing with other slaves on the cotton plantations, and that this proto-Blues connection is the origin of the *blue yodel*. Another theory: The yodel could also come from Hawaii, because 1) it was sung in Hawaii using a technique similar to the Tyrol since long before the first white man arrived there, 2) there were migrations of workers from Mexico and the south of the United States towards the late 1800s, which could have introduced the Spanish guitar to the islands, therefore 3) the guitar, with the Hawaiian songs, could have resulted in the blue yodel. “*Do not leave yet, there is still more!*”: there are also some non-documented songs of the North American Indians that passed from the highest to the deepest keys, according to the explanations by the Indians themselves. Also, the Saami of northern

Scandinavia used a similar technique to sing their songs (yoking). And Tarzan also yodelled. So did the dwarfs of Snow White. And Sly and the Stone family. And Cher. And Daft Punk. These last two examples are incredible because they are now. Yodelling continues, adjusting to the new times, evolving. Both Cher and Daft Punk reproduce what the Pygmies did 9,000 years ago, but do it electronically with a device called Auto-Tune that was originally used to place voice notes in their place. So the Yodel is not something so quaint and alien to us. It is a song that has always accompanied mankind, and however strange it may seem, it continues to do so. And if not, we could ask the 20,000 kids who have taken off their t-shirts and are jumping around with a healthy face while they sing “One more time” at the Sónar night in the Zona Franca.

I’m sure the first time I heard Jimmie Rodgers singing “Waiting for a train”, when the time came to do “*yodel-ehi-ho de-lehi-oh deli-dele-hi*” I connected with all that humanity. I connected with decades and decades of people who had experienced great changes, who had lived hard lives, who had shared their life experiences through these songs. People who had sung laments and joys, sorrows and celebrations. It was a whirlwind that travelled down my spine, a true communion that made me enter a breed formed by all the people who had lived with this song since time immemorial. The thing was that I did not know all this because I had not yet read the bible of yodelling according to Bart Plantenga: *Yodel-Ay-Ee-Oo. The secret history of yodeling around the world*. Well, I did not know but I did feel it, because those things do not need words.

So, although almost 100 years have passed since the great Jimmie Rodgers sang that “*yodel-ehi-ho de-lehi-oh deli-dele-hi*”, we’re not that far away. Or at least that is what I would like to think.

Electropop (el punk) EL GRAN PUZZLE COZMICO + HIDROGENESE

I enter a concert hall. It is a festival with many groups. It started a while ago. There is a guy on stage alone and he has a microphone in his hand. He puts on music and sings. The music is a cheap techno that is quite loud. What did he say? I think I didn’t understand it very well. Let’s see if he says it again. He does say it again. It cannot be. Yes I had understood it correctly. It cannot be. He has a hand on his waist. As he sings he moves around the stage as if in his lounge at home. “*la cabra tira al monte y la Pantoja se tira a la María del Montie*” Espectacular. Más: “*¡Paquirrín, rín, rín, Paquirrín rín, rín,*

paquidermo!” No tinc paraules. “*En el caso hipotético de que el Rey tuviera un hijo con John Bon Jovi, se llamaría John Borbón Jovi*”. He has said it again. It is the return of the song. I’m stunned. I cannot stop watching it. He is saying: “Bertín Osborne, naked, horseriding along the beach”. What an image. The guy continues: “*la cabra tira al monte y la Pantoja se tira a la María del Monte*”. Spectacular. More: “*¡Paquirrín, rín, rín, Paquirrín rín, rín, paquidermo!*” I am speechless. “*En el caso hipotético de que el Rey tuviera un hijo con John Bon Jovi, se llamaría John Borbón Jovi*”. Brillant. “*Trabajas de dependiente en una droguería y eres dependiente de las drogas de diseño. Eres drogodependiente*”. Where has this character emerged from? He doesn’t stope: “*han pillao al teletubbie morao en Rio de Janeiro de Ubrique. Estaba con un Lunni*”. And even more: “*de vacaciones, en un yate con Pedro Ruiz*”. Another tremendous image. This guy is the last poet: “*tu abuela es ochentera? no, que tiene Alzheimer, i no se enterá*”. He ends the concert shouting with all his might: “*Julián Muñoz guilty! ¡Julián Muñoz guilty!*” I came with five friends and the same thing has happened to us all. We ended up with our mouths open, not saying a word, unable to take our eyes off the stage set, without moving, without moving to go and get a beer. It was incredible. And yes, I could justify it by saying that laughing about everything is the only coherent position in a world where it is increasingly more difficult to understand, and that when you understand something, you doubt as to whether it would have been better to continue without understanding anything. But no. I do not intend to justify it thus because I don’t care. That day I spent one of the best times I can remember having in a concert hall. Since then I have been a fan and am willing to tear my shirt for the Gran Puzzle Cozmico without any fear that electro-pop is the punk of today; and that the vast majority of groups today consider themselves punks only because they are repeating a pattern that has lost all its strength and its full meaning. The electro-pop people are people who have no fucking idea of music but they can’t care because they only want to say things. They make music in the simplest way and with what they have at hand without worrying about transcending. They take a computer or a drum, set up four supports, say what they want to say and go and shit on the road. That is why it has this freshness, this immediacy. Everything is close, it’s funny and true. The electro is all that was when punk began.

Another example? Hidrogenesse. Whenever I see them in concert the same thing happens: Carlos Ballesteros starts singing and

I think “Hell, I’d forgotten how badly that guy sings and how well he deals with it.” And yes, yes, the concert continues. Carlos continues singing appallingly but it is still all the same, and I increasingly like their attitude, what the lyrics say and the whole proposal in general. After a while I don’t care if he sings better or worse, and when the concert ends and I go out of the door, I start running towards the nearest church to light a candle for St. Cecilia, and pray three Lord’s Prayers and two Hail Marys because Carlos Ballesteros does not want to continue falling singing lessons, so I can again enjoy the next concert the way I did this one. The problem is that, usually, at that time, the churches are closed. Hidrogenesse would not be the same if Carlos Ballesteros put the notes in place. At least I would not like them as much. It only happens with them and could only happen with them because it is a question of attitude and vital position. In fact, it is a radical and uncompromising political stance. They are not here to show us how talented they are with an instrument, or to show us how much they know about music, they are here to say what they mean, to show us their world and their way of seeing things. To do this, they do not need to reproduce major learned riffs or hide in great technical boasts, all you need is to be yourself, with your attitudes and your limitations. And that is what they do, such a simple and difficult thing as showing themselves as they are. No more, no less. And afterwards I will still feel that electropop is nonsense.....

Now we are entering marshy ground which can lead to the loss of a few friends (more) and that when entering a public space I feel a series of stares that feel like knives sticking in my body. I do not care, let’s go. With a pair.

“Esta noche quiero brandy” DYANGO

Who has never felt like that? Who has not feel like going out to drink spirits after a horrible day at work, for example? Or after a particularly bitter argument with their partner? Or after feeling bad after a big fight with a good friend? Or after their girlfriend left? Or after being diagnosed a serious illness? Or after 23F? Because I have felt that way. No, not on 23F. Specifically, it was the day my girlfriend told me that our relationship was over and that she was having an affair with my work colleague. A colleague I had introduced her to. I don’t know if anything similar ever happened to you but I can guarantee it is a major bummer. And no, I will not start explaining now how I felt. What I will tell you is what I did when I got home: I sat on the sofa, I explained the whole story to my friend / almost-brother / confessor / room-

mate, he said “things happen for a reason” (I didn’t understand that and still don’t today, but I don’t care any more) and he left to leave me alone. I poured myself a glass of whisky and started crying. And the fact is that I never did like whisky. But I kept on crying and drinking whisky, I actually drank a few glasses. At that time I did not think of this song or any other, even by Dyango. I was in no mood to listen to any music. I just wanted to be alone, sipping a whisky I didn’t like, and crying. At that time I did not feel identified with the song at all.

Now years have passed and when I hear this song I do not remember that moment. It is not that the song connects with my memory to transport me there, no. What happens now is that I recognize a certain truth, I find that it defines a universal time very well – I don’t know if I have gone too far – I mean a moment through which I have passed the same as many other people, and however topical the song may be, it contains a truth that is “as real as life itself”. In addition, Dyango is an incomparable performer who does things with his voice that nobody else can do.

Something similar happens with “A usted señora”, that song in which, in short, he tells an elderly lady who lives alone not to stay at home, to stop any nonsense, to go out and enjoy herself, not to worry about “*what people will say*” and “*discover the beauty of a wrinkle*”. Well, I have never felt that way but the same is true of the other song, it is not literal. I don’t feel identified directly but I feel that I understand the truth it contains: it is that moment in which we self-exclude ourself from a certain environment due to prejudices regarding age. It’s like going to the Apollo on Friday night and realize that the average age is considerably lower than ours. The natural reaction will be to go to the bar, grab a gin and tonic and not move away from the bar for anything in the world, or to sit in the darkest corner of the whole room. But at this point Dyango appears as the white centaur emerging from the darkness of the night, passing the crowd of girls dancing, turning towards us, with the white tuxedo shirt open to the fourth button, his forehead beaded with sweat and his bow tie undone at his neck. Reaching us, he takes our gin and tonic and downs a slug, he takes us to the centre of the dance floor while singing us this song over the drum of Dave Clarke, he takes our hand and makes us start dancing, forget the nonsense about our age and focus on having a good time, which is what really matters. And we, we down a few more gin and tonics and continue dancing all night. And we have a lot of fun. And the next morning we have a little hangover but remember the night before and we half

smile while thinking: I'm glad I found Dyango last night."

What happens with romantic music? What does it uncover and put on the table of the two concepts that are clashing in the background of this article?: principles and prejudices. I quickly polish them off: they are nonsense and make no sense. Overcoming them is a constant and compassionless struggle, because the bastards attack you when you least expect it, but it is as easy as opening your mind and your ass will follow you (thanks George). With principles it is more difficult because it means a conscious position that has come after reasoning. When talking about music this position remains clear, but ignorance can play a trick and transform into prejudice what began as a principle.

Of all music, "romantic" music is the best for us to talk about principles, which is really what this article is about; we all have a sappy person inside (of course), and when we hear Dyango, for example, saying that "... we were like that happy summer in which I kissed your white hands, madly in love, " we feel identified, although it is deep down in our conscience, because perhaps those hands were not especially white, but we have all had a summer romance and we all enjoy remembering a pleasant moment. The thing is that it is not a good idea to say it, or at least to say it like Dyango does. Then there are people who prefer to hide behind a supposed "higher vulgarity" – high culture, I think they call it – to say that they are only interested in how Martí i Pol or Pere Gimferrer talk about love, but deep down, they are as vulgar as everyone else because the origin of everything is the same. There is not much difference in remembering the hands of a summer love and, well, now I was going to write that thing about eating the chocolates that are given by the body of our loved one but perhaps it is a rather extreme example. Not the chocolates, but receiving a little wee when in the "heat of the battle" has happened to all of us, hasn't it? So, what I was saying, is that it's the same thing, and it is hardly surprising that the same person, at a certain moment, is moved when thinking about the hands of a summer love, and at another moment feels a shiver from the coccyx to the nape remembering that moment of loss of control from the night before. We all have a vulgar person inside us who peeks out every time we listen to "light" music. But it is our principles that make us put our head back in based on small slaps or that we allow it to come out to have a gin and tonic with the tuxedo all undone, in the middle of the dance floor. And with the little wee subject exactly the

same thing happens. Both things can be condemned from the principles viewpoint, but stopping fooling around and going through the two increases our experience and enriches us as people. Everything depends on where you place the limit. I, in this sense, declare myself an experiences junkie, not so much as Mr. Gimferrer, it must be said, but I am a specialist in the sport of detecting my principles in order to jump over them bullfighter style. For that reason I have so few. I suppose that it is for that reason that I like, with the same intensity, Burzum, Jimmie Rodgers, Hidrogenesse Dyango. ■

AGRUPACIÓN SEÑOR SERRANO

THE TRIUMPHS OF SISYPHUS Ferran Dordal

To most men, experience is like the stern lights of a ship, which illumine only the track it has passed.

S.T. Coleridge

Almost five years have passed. It was autumn 2005 and the Temporada Alta Festival was promptly arriving at its annual date. That year, an innovative proposal was presented at a press conference. Led by Àlex Serrano, as a group of ten young artists from many different disciplines, we tried to clarify what exactly were the Capsules at 1←which would be offered as part of the festival programme. Victor Molina, in a short text which served to introduce the aforementioned Capsules, rehearsed with enormous suggestive capacity the following definition: "... they are a theatrical genre. Stage aphorisms. They last a maximum of fifteen minutes. Not a single scene is superfluous in any of them. They are numerous concentrates of experiences, games, fears, trials. Injections of courage. They have the values and surprise of an axiom. (...) Each returns the scene to its origin, to the shared commemoration of an event." Serrano, founder, authentic ideologist and architect of AREAtangent in those interesting early years full of bold stage proposals, assumed his role as father of the baby and let loose before the press a lapidary sentence which at that time seemed to me no more than an ingenious occurrence in the form of an effective slogan: "We have come to make mistakes." Maybe I was the first to be wrong.

2010. Alex Serrano now directs the Agrupación Señor Serrano, a heterogeneous group led by himself, which according to the explanation on his website "works on the creation of stage projects

based on experimentation, play and the search for new languages". With the point of ironic detachment that characterizes him he adds, "We know that this sounds like a cliché, but that is what the thing we like doing is called." Their difficult-to-categorize stage proposals have received awards and distinctions at different choreographic and theatrical festivals and events around Spain and they have managed to make a name for themselves within the complex world of so-called "alternative" theatre, leading to some of their recent performances being selected for three years running (2007, 2008 and 2009) for the Red de Salas Alternativas circuit. Their performances have also crossed the borders of our country and have been seen at some prestigious international exhibitions such as the Hybrides Festival of Montpellier or The Insoliti of Turin, as well as in the regular programming of some international centers devoted to experimentation such as the Fabrik [Potsdam] in Berlin. The good results obtained in their latest creations and the successful mastery achieved with some of their tools for expression have gone beyond the boundaries of "alternative" theatre to the point that they recently have worked with other directors better known by the public. Within this field a highlight would be the recent collaboration with Alex Rigola, in *Nixon / Frost (unplugged escénic)*, a production for which Serrano has developed a real visual drama that accompanied and scanned the dramatic narrative.

Five years after that press conference and eight shows later, Serrano has undoubtedly evolved as a creator towards more elaborate forms of stage construction, to the achievement of an own constantly evolving grammar, but unlike others of his peers inebriated by the fortuitous discovery of a more or less effective stage formula, he has known how to maintain above all the initial purity of spirit of his early proposals. In other words, he has had the wisdom and honesty to keep wandering as the driving force behind his stage activity. Unlike other forms of artistic expression such as cinema, where wild economic factors force the absolute prioritisation of the result in many of their phases of creative development, the performing arts survive as a haven akin to experimentation. In this experimental field, the rehearsal takes on an absolutely key main role. Rehearsals are not a more or less lengthy inevitable toll which must be passed in order to achieve the final results, they are not a part of the creative process, they are undoubtedly its true heart, the centre towards which all energies are conveyed and from which they will emerge transformed,, waiting for their vital clash with

the public. "Because I am nothing, I can allow myself everything," writes Witold Gombrowicz at some stage in his celebrated diaries. This could be a similar feeling at the beginning of a process of rehearsals, when what we have so often dreamed, planned, imagined, is still nothing concrete and therefore can become "anything". It is a time of doubts and hopes, fears and surprises, of enthusiasms and uncertainties. It is the moment for erring and wandering, a time when all the hesitations and doubts become fruitful. It is only during the rehearsal that a show really ends up configuring its full potential. It is at this moment when finally the creator can let himself test all the scenarios and ideas accumulated *a priori*, to distinguish, distill and organize them to face their formalization and their no less essential presentation before an audience. So much so that the more or less widespread claim that the most interesting part of a show is the rehearsals, although it may sound topical and inevitably be misunderstood by the general public, which seems to take such statements as a kind of intolerable attack of snobbery on behalf of the creator to exalt their own creative work, tends to be true. The rehearsal is fertile territory for experimentation, where not only is it necessary but even essential to make mistakes.

Those of us who have followed with some attention over the years the evolution of the work of Senyor Serrano, have found there two main organically interrelated features. Firstly, a very obvious one is the constant mixing of heterogeneous stage languages. Based on a founding decision such as a departure from more conventional forms of theatrical representation, Serrano opts for the sum and synthesis of various stage languages. His proposals are open to the principles of performance, dance, video, often based on interactive applications, the use of sound in its most diverse varieties and / or theatre of objects. So far nothing that is very innovative. There are multiple groups, and creators who have chosen and choose constantly the synthesis of languages as an aesthetic path. While many groups are seeking their coordinates in the synthesis of aesthetic languages, it is equally true that most of these groups, after the inevitable initial experiments, are content to specialize when you consider that since then, they have appropriated some aesthetics, and persevere only in a single line of development, voluntarily limiting the field of research. And here is where Serrano surprises. His radical and non-negotiable approach to experimentation, allowing himself to err not only in the pure sense of being wrong, but especially in not following the path preset by his own evolution as

a creator, is a feature that gives Serrano his true uniqueness. Serrano gets notable partial results in each of the shows, but this does not prevent the next start opening up towards new paths and impulses, which inevitably he has not yet mastered. A more or less chronological analysis of the performances is especially significant in this respect. In almost all of the shows, Serrano commits to rehearsing new forms of expression. Without abandoning previous findings, new, as yet unmastered fields of research are prioritised. An erring, a will to experiment and never be fully satisfied with the results previously obtained, which in no case should be understood as a product of dissatisfaction, to the contrary, as staying faithful to certain aesthetic postulates, much stronger than might appear at first glance.

Thus, after co-directing *Fuga* (2003), where he experimented with some narrative devices close to physical theatre and the environment of textual theatre closest to performance art, Serrano also co-directed *DNS* (2004), where he experimented with the fruitful relationship between dance-theatre and video, and *O'5 (las cosas son la mitad de complicadas de lo que parecen)* (2004), which tried out a curious and extremely free review of the novel *The Cloven Viscount* by Italo Calvino based on collective creation. These are three irregular and somewhat confusing shows, where guessing despite everything being constant research, probably what will end up weighing most and above all an authentic need to be confronted with a complex stage creation, rather than an authentic stage. We consider these three shows, as well as the various capsules and small performances that took place during those years also, as the prehistory of Sr. Serrano.

His next show, *RUN (¿Cuándo vas a parar?)* (2004), was a huge step in his career. Serrano assumes absolute responsibility for his first time as director and playwright in this show where the dance and the use of interactive video, along with a significant textual burden, are the protagonists. *RUN* had an excellent technical structure, one of the other characteristics of all the subsequent work of Serrano, and managed to make him a place for the first time ever in the complex mechanisms of the most radical and innovative proposals thanks to the incubator scholarship from the PNRM Olot Festival and co-production of the Visual and Puppet Theatre Festival of Barcelona. This show, though produced under the umbrella of AREAtangent, also somewhat marked Serrano's artistic coming of age and inescapable need to create a production structure that allows him to develop projects with total freedom. A need that would end up being formalized

a couple of years and three shows later with the constitution of the Agrupación Señor Serrano. In a country like ours where what is valued above all are results, in which unfortunately there is very little room for experimentation and artistic research, it is necessary to celebrate the emergence of artistic models of this kind. Serrano has managed to build a stronghold from which to research further with artistic autonomy, as well as choose to seek independent production models that seek financing through the route of co-production in terms of co-financing. His also remarkable business vision has already achieved as we pointed out earlier, what however seemed more difficult, successfully entering the alternative exhibition circuits and also a none-too-contemptible presence at festivals and other events. A presence that must be evaluated more positively, if we consider that these proposals are completely personal, not at all complacent with the taste of more mainstream audiences.

After *RUN*, Serrano returned to dance, stripping it of everything that is accessory and seeking the essence in *BACK* and *Nada*, experimenting with non-conventional spaces and with magic in *Autòpsia*, he sought the confusion between reality and performance through a false confessional character of a markedly performance tone in *Mil tristos tigres* and fully entered the world of theatre of objects and its manipulation in the complementary leaflet formed by *Contra.Natura* and *Artefacte*. Systematically distanced from the traditional lazy dramatic devices that, all their proposals end up opting for an accurate concern regarding the plastic composition of the stage, which often takes them close to borderline territories with different artistic manifestations that are not necessarily scenic. They all adventure towards new expressive routes, with the aim of opening up to new fields, but without renouncing previous findings. It is in this sense that I think that Serrano's work continues open to erring as the centre of its stage action, perhaps citing Novalis without knowing it when affirming that "the error is the necessary instrument of truth". But against what a hasty superficial analysis could lead one to think, the error or the mistake are not only fertile and or daring driving forces through which Serrano approaches experimentation and constant development. Without wishing to enter into the difficult task of trying to synthesize the different thematic areas planted along their diverse creations, I think there are two constants that are characterised by their persistence, I would dare to affirm that in each and every one of his creations, despite being treated from the most diverse artistic languages and from a

broad multiplicity of points of view. These are two constants surprisingly close to the semantic field of wandering and being wrong. I refer to failure and repetition in this failure. Serrano's pieces are full of all kinds of contemporary Sisyphuses condemned to repeat and persist, one after another, in succession from their mistakes. It is perhaps in Europe where this recidivism in the error is more developed, as it is treated from various points of view and becomes the structural issue of a play organised based on a series of repetitions / variations, until the point that this constancy in failure ends up becoming somewhat of a metaphor of the old errors to which the old continent that gives name to the play. But all of Serrano's plays have played with this idea one way or another, either from the idea of sheer repetition, the house successively buried by various materials and the plays by Serrano played with this idea one way or another, either from the idea of sheer repetition, the house successively hung by various materials in *Contra.Natura* and in *Artefacte*, or an idea closer to Nietzschean principles of the eternal return, as the structural circularity of BACK.

If we allow ourselves to be tempted by succulent games of analogies that always allow us to establish the mythological tradition, it continues to be important to analyze further the myth of Sisyphus. This mythological character, son of Aeolus and Enarete was punished and made to push a huge stone uphill that, before he reached the top, inevitably rolled down the mountain and so Sisyphus was forced to start his work over again, and thus the whole of eternity. Some mythological traditions suggest that the reason for this punishment was that Sisyphus had revealed divine intentions to mortals. Sisyphus, following the footsteps of Prometheus, another illustrious rebel punished for opposing the divine will, was thus forever condemned to fail for having offered men the truth. This way the failure acquires, in this myth, a revealing dignity that we often hold back, becoming an indispensable way towards the real truth.

At this point, perhaps we should ask ourselves where Sr. Serrano is heading towards. Is he a kind of Sisyphean double condemned to wander constantly for having dared to get closer to the truth onstage? Is this indomitable erratic attitude an end in itself? It is difficult to take risks on making hypotheses about what paths to take in a more or less immediate future production. At present not only are signs of exhaustion easily inferred in the modus operandi, but this also seems to be the most fertile time. I, for my part, will continue following the new proposals in order to prove it. I can

only hope that he will persevere in his rigorous and fruitful erratic path, full of good ideas and true stage findings, and that the inevitable encounter with the beautiful moment does not fatally lead it to come to a stop.

Ferran Dordal (Barcelona, 1979) graduated in Humanities at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and in Stage direction and Dramaturgy at the Institut del Teatre.

He has written and directed the pieces "Autopicografía" (Temporada Alta 2005), "To the happy few" (Temporada Alta 2006), "Faust c'est moi o com s'arriba a ser allò que s'és" (Institut del Teatre 2007), "Souvenirs d'egotisme" (Festival Lola 2007) and "Memories dels temps de la immaduresa" (Assaig Obert Teatre Lliure, 2008). He is currently developing a study on contemporary performing arts in Berlin. ■

LOLA ARIAS

THE DIARY OF MY LIFE AFTER (Extract from the book *Mi vida después*)

Before the work.

There is a picture of me at age 9, dressed in my mother's clothes, her glasses and a newspaper in my hand. In that picture I acted as my mother and I acted my future at the same time. Whenever I look at that picture I think my mother and I are superimposed, as if two generations were meeting, as if she and I were the same person separated by some strange warp of time. I guess many people have a picture in their father's or mother's clothes in their childhood album. For me, that childish desire to represent my parent, brought the idea of producing a work in which the children put on parents' clothing to reconstruct their lives, as if they were stuntmen willing to revive the most difficult scenes of their lives.

And I thought the actors in this work had to be of my generation. A generation born during the military dictatorship, which grew up between fragmented, blurred or invented stories about what happened at that time.

Then I began to interview actors from my generation about their family history. Each one came to me with photos, letters and belongings of their parents. They were very special meetings where I became a sort of spy, invading the privacy of others. Some questions were always the same: What was it like on the day that you were born? What were your parents doing around that time? If you had to play your father or your mother, how would you do it? How are you going to die?

So I discovered many amazing stories from my own generation. Choosing the actors to star in the play was like mixing photo albums of different people so that when reflected against each other, they created a new meaning.

Diary February 2008

First rehearsals. A stage full of used clothing and actors trying to tell their parents' lives through photos, letters and objects. Liza tries to portray the life of exiles in Mexico, Carla reconstructs the training of the ERP guerrillas, Blas revives his father's stories as a priest, Vanina dons her father's police uniform which is three sizes too big for her and tries to describe him but realizes that she has too many images of him that contradict each other, Pablo puts on his grandfather's boots and dances malambo as if no time ever passed between them.

April 2008.

I am in Switzerland rehearsing *Airport Kids* but I am writing and thinking about ideas for my life afterwards. I want to do a play where an actress attends an audition to find the father she never knew, another work where the actors' parents are sitting among the audience and at one point rise from their seats and go up on stage to replace the actors, another work in which actors film memories for the future.

May 2008

I am still in Switzerland. I read books and watch films on the history of the seventies and our generation. I do not think that *Mi vida después* should be a dark, or melancholy, or demagogic work. It must show the strength, humour and intelligence of the actors who perform it.

July 2008

We take up rehearsals once more. Next to the theatre there is a building site where a building is being built while we want to tell the story of our parents. The noise of the drills gets into our heads as though we are making holes in the past.

August 2008

While Carla reads the last letter her father wrote before he died, a man passes through the middle of the scene with a towel and shampoo. At all rehearsals we witness a steady parade of extras (cleaning people, technical people, the machinery operators). I think the work should include one of them passing through every two or three minutes with a sign stating their position, like a walk by the theatre's ghosts.

September 2008

For several rehearsals I am dazed and con-

fused. There is something missing. Among the many actors in their twenties and thirties who play children, I need one that is also a parent. I return to auditions to find an actor with a child.

In one rehearsal Mariano comes and tells us the story of his father who was a motor-journalist and Peronist Youth militant. Dressed in his father's racing suit, he says that his father had a workshop where he hid weapons concealed in the chassis of the cars. Then he tells us that his father disappeared when he was three years old and we heard a tape of his father's voice talking to him as a small child. His son Moreno listens to the tape with him, like a miniature copy of a past scene. Finally, we decided to incorporate Mariano and Moreno into the work.

October 2008

I dream that Vanina's father dies and at the end of October, Liza's father dies of a sudden lung cancer. Liza stops coming to rehearsals. We are all sad that she is not with us but we understand her grief and wait for her.

November 2008

Each of the actors becomes a researcher investigating the history of his/her parents' and his/her own life. Every day the actors come in with new information and new ideas. Carla talks to John, her father's friend from the ERP, and performs the training using matches. Vanina has a chat with her policeman uncle and comes to the rehearsal crying. Mariano writes letters to a friend of his father in exile who tells him what happened to his father's militant group in Florida. Blas brings increasingly strange stories from the seminary. Pablo finds his family tree.

February 2009

Blas tells the story of his immortal tortoise. A tortoise that is the same age as his father. We decided to incorporate it as a new character in the play. The tortoise Pancho, starts to come to rehearsals.

March 2009

We rehearse every day. Repeating family histories over and over has a rare distancing effect. The stories are no longer so close and we can also think about them as if they were the lives of others. We are exhausted but happy. We want the work to stop being a private experience and be converted into something in the minds of others.

Mi vida después by Lola Arias was the last work programmed by Vivi Tellas as director of the Teatro Sarmiento's series *Biodramas*, a work that stood as a turning point for the series while radicalising it towards autobiography and eye-witness

account in the style of "real fiction". In the original project, Vivi Tellas made this statement of guerrilla aesthetics: "This biodrama is part of what one might call the "return to the real" in the field of performance. After nearly two decades of drills and simulations, what returns, partly as opposition, partly as a reversal – is the idea that there is still experience, and that art should invent some new way to relate to it. The trend, which is worldwide, ranges from phenomena of mass culture such as reality shows to the most advanced expressions of contemporary art, through the resurrection of what were until now "minor" genres, such as the documentary, the eye-witness account or the autobiography. The return of experience – what in Biodrama is called "life" – is also the return of The Personal. The Self returns, yes, but it is an immediately cultural, social, even political Self."

Mi vida después, a kind of *Vidas paralelas* lived during the years of military dictatorship in Argentina, has six characters who act as presenters of the biographies of their parents, a former priest who left the priesthood, three militants from Montoneros, an ERP sergeant, an intelligence officer and a bank employee. The first novelty of the work is that it puts them all under the spotlight as a choral portrait of daily life under a regime of terror. The kidnapping and disappearance of two fathers, Horacio Speratti and Carlos Crespo, do not serve as an underscore in the story of their children nor do they play any greater role in the total work. Blas Arrese Igor, acting as his parish priest father says "theology class is suspended as Father Podesta was thrown out because he collaborated with the workers and had a girlfriend." Pablo Lugones acting as his father, says "I get home from work at a cooperative. The streets are blocked by a demonstration. I get off and walk the twenty blocks that separate me from home."

Both the former priest whose son would have taken a statement that he did not belong to any political party except that of God, and the employee whose son Paul recounted that he shaved his beard off because a military controller said it was typical of terrorists, are presented without critical emphasis, contrary to the fictions that tend to show those who crossed the dictatorship without regard to the call of politics as a neighbourhood Judas or a Pilate from the other side of the dividing wall. Lola Arias, also director of the play, has designed a full set of what might be called "generational resources" such as the video camera, clown and parody techniques, in this case a script from a photonovel. Against an enormous screen on which her own

face is projected, Liza Casullo recites the marriage proposal made by Nicholas Casullo to Ana Amado, her parents, following a threat from the A.A.A.:

"My father: I received a note containing a death threat. My mother blinks and opens her eyes. My father: Do you want to marry me? My mother puts on her robot face. My father goes to her. Spotlight on the two as they kiss for seven and a half minutes. "The discourses of *Mi vida después* can not be reduced to their documentary origins and the product of research: synthesized and reworked by the offspring-actors they are, however, the work of an author who has noted lucidly in her diary "I do not want *Mi vida después* to be melancholy or demagogic".

The game of differences

At the end of *Las hermanas alemanas*, Jan, the son of an Al Fatah militant killed in prison, asked to find out his own story with the same abruptness with which his mother from prison demanded expensive items of make-up – less on a whim than to evade the world of need. The question is not so much posed as written on his tragic face "Didn't she think about me?" Would *giving life* be radically opposed to *giving one's life*? The members of the group H.I.J.O.S. changed that question to ask the names of the murderers and demand the trial and punishment of the culprits. But other *children*, even those who do not aspire to give public evidence, assume they have asked that question from anger or feelings of abandonment, associating the "abandonment" to the very choice of forming part of the revolutionary struggle that would link to a certainty that converts the question into mere rhetoric upon removing the question marks: "He didn't think about me"; this concern often survives in different ways in their artistic productions. A new feature of *Mi vida después* is not to present the choice between *giving life* and *giving one's life*. When Mariano plays the voice of his father from an old reel tape recorder, he says "This is the part I like best: my father saying my name". In the audio, Horacio Speratti, whose war name was "Flaco" says "Mariano" in different tones, with that slightly overacted yet mimetic tone usually used to address children. The power of the scene is doubled because he is the son of Mariano Speratti Moreno, four years old, who turned on the tape recorder resting on his knees. That voice plays as a document and ghost but, above all, as a sound talisman of extreme symbolic condensation. From the same perspective, Carla Crespo, while reading the last letter from her father, killed in the attack on the Domingo Viejobueno Depot in Monte Chingolo, finds the language of love

entwined with that of a political letter (“... the situation across the country is really encouraging for the popular side. I hope that you, I and every one of us know how to take advantage and push so that we can soon achieve that future that our people so desire. When you write back, talk to me about yourself and the kid, you know how much I want to see him running, talking (that will still take some time, right?). She cut short to point out “The kid is me. I find it funny because it makes me think of a baby *gaucho*.” Whether that reconciliation between political militancy and children takes place remains unanswered, because in *Mi vida después* what is at stake is the biography of a *parent*. Was that dilemma of “militancy or me” that has crept back into the lives of some children of the missing at some stage in their lives/works positioned closer to the mother? However, the mothers of *Mi vida después* embody, within their respective partnerships, a varied position of symmetry with their spouses. The biographical accounts of the militant mothers say that Liza’s and Mariano’s mothers militated in Montoneros and Carla’s mother in the E.R.P.: “Before I was born my father was stationed in Tucumán. My mom could not go with him because she was pregnant. But my mother had very important jobs within the party, as she did counter-intelligence. She had the files of all militants on microfilm stored in a refrigerator.” *Mi vida después* uses elements of *escrache*, the political theatre created by H.I.J.O.S.: Vanina Falco has staged a biography of her intelligence officer father and appropriator of her young son, Juan. Of all the characters in the play she is the only one who shows not an object belonging to her father – Blas shows a missal, a San Benito and a turtle, Carla, a letter, Paul a few super-eight films, Mariano, a tape recorder, Liza, some books – but rather a file. Each performance gives an incriminating testimony with regard to the audience although it repeats “But the sad thing is that my father will always be my father even if I don’t want to see him any more”.

To a greater extent *Mi vida después* re-elaborates the stage resources transmitted by the documentary fiction produced by artists born during the military dictatorship and who carry a political genealogy. One of them is to associate the personal avatar to political history: “1976: The military coup was declared and I was born”, says Carla. “1974: Perón died and I was born”, says Vanina, “2008. The Campo cut off the roads. My father died,” says Liza. When in her film *Los Rubios*, Albertina Carri produced the scene of the

kidnapping of her parents, Ana Maria Caruso and Roberto Carri, using Playmobil dolls, Gonzalo Aguilar responded to criticism by pointing out the role of the miniature as preservation and domestication of a threatened memory. It should be noted that miniaturization is also a practice used to circulate policy documents in clandestine militancy. These loans are less influences than common properties of a new generation of artists willing to take documentary fiction up a step. In *Mi vida después* truth is neither uniform nor one.

The first “truth” received by Carla would have been at the age of six years when her mother told her that her father had died in a car accident. The accident is acted out by the actors who *play* a car with a few chairs, sit under the wind of a fan and suddenly lower their heads. Carla enumerates with the same tone – like someone who sits an exam already knowing the questions – the *truths* surrounding the death of her father. One holds the ideals of militancy, the other points towards the building of a hero: “At age 14, during a discussion between my mother and my grandmother, I learned that my father died in 1975 in Monte Chingolo, during a clash between the People’s Revolutionary Army and the military. The ERP wanted the Regiment to stock up on weapons and show the people the great strength they had” (...) “23 December”, the day before Christmas Eve. My father and his colleagues were in a car behind a truck with a mission to enter the barracks. My father was the front seat passenger. The truck hit the gate and they went in behind it. They advanced 100 metres. They got out of the car. My father and his colleague got out and saw that the military was waiting for them. My father thought: someone snitched on us, we have an infiltrator. Just then, he was wounded in the stomach and his colleague in the leg. They fell to the ground. Their colleagues came to help and he gave them the order from the ground to withdraw. Shortly afterwards, they bled to death.”

Since there is never *only one* father, Vanina Falco lists her policeman father through as many characters as blue suits he used: “Luis 1, the man selling remedies who cured me of my fever when I was sick, Luis 2, the police officer working for the intelligence service, Luis 3, the sportsman who called me dolphin and swam with me until we could no longer see the shore, Luis 4, the man who posed like a playboy in all the photos, Luis 5, the man who broke guitars, glasses, furniture and bones

when he was angry”. But also in *Mi vida después* there is a prophetic truth that is imparted by a tortoise (a figure which in Argentinian tradition has been linked to president Illia and checkmated democracy, although in mythology it defeated Achilles) who is asked “In the future Argentina will there be a revolution?” Then he traces two paths with chalk that culminate in two boxes with one saying yes, the other no. The tortoise improvises each time (one prophecy per performance?)

The legacy of desire

In *Mi vida después* the transmission of a legacy from parents to children is discontinuous, ambiguous, non-hierarchical. So Pablo can declare “In my family tree there are generals, conquerors, poets and police. But the story that impressed me most was the branch of Leopoldo. Leopoldo Lugones, the great poet who committed suicide in El Tigre, had a son Leopoldo who was a police torturer who committed suicide. The daughter of the latter was a guerrilla killed during the dictatorship and her son was a rocker who committed suicide in El Tigre like his great-grandfather. My branch of the Lugones is that of the invisible men. Not heroes, not rich, nor torturers, nor poets, nor revolutionaries, nor suicides, nor anything.” But then he would show the points in common between his grandfather who bred horses, his father’s banking and himself: their love of Malambo. Thus *Mi vida después* neutralises seemingly more striking legacies such as political vocation, and epic dimension, by rescuing the amateur transmission that is embodied in the last generation as a wish fulfilled: dancing Malambo. This is what Pablo Lugones does in a suggestive scene, from so many in *Mi vida después* in which *theatre takes place* in the peaks of maximum protein energy: He dances the Malambo, firstly in a deaf way despite the violent heel tapping, on mountains of old clothes, supposedly from the older people and generations that have formed part of the plot of the work – “the costume is a plot!” said Barthes, until the tapping starts ringing bells and then grows to suggest a patriotic but somewhat *buffo* end such as that which operatively is called “life”.

If it is said that the teacher transmits essentially what he does not know, the political activist of the seventies may have conveyed what militant asceticism sent into hiding – personal desire, the free nature of art, Eros choosing partner over companion. Perhaps for this reason Liza Casullo, after showing the pile of books written by Nicolás Casullo, says she prefers the first, *Para hacer el amor en los parques*, precisely that in which her father shows himself to be *vanguardist* in the

sense of Breton and less in that of Ché, or of Cortázar who read more of Breton than of Ché: He coloured the faces of the 95,000 natives of Buenos Aires with phosphorescent paint and tied a black flashlight to their waists, projecting the light onto the dead grimaces that offered no resistance. Thus he went along releasing them in batches, following a strawberry-flavoured stimulant pill placed in their mouths. It was time. The horror. The revolution allows and legitimises everything in its holy immemorial name (...). Chubby and huge hipped, the Gordas Tetonas make their dancing approach. Mothers, aunts, teachers, professors, actresses. They emerge now from the depths of our national history, from May, from Tucumán, the Andes, the unforgettable squadron of Gordas Tetonas. Total victory then, although not the last of the revolutionary forces. The city, meanwhile, hears the death rattle of an era. Liza Casullo had begun rehearsals for *Mi vida después* when she returned to the work in full mourning and started rehearsing the reading of this text, the voice of her dead father was superimposed in her imagination, until she stopped listening to it in order to *recognise her own voice*.

MI VIDA DESPUÉS (MY LIFE AFTER) Brenda Werth

Premiered in Buenos Aires in March 2009, Lola Arias’s *Mi vida después* (My Life After) expands the growing repertoire of plays addressing the memories of the disappeared from the perspectives of their children’s generation. Arias’s play introduces six individuals born between 1972 and 1983, who reconstruct the youth of their parents with the aid of personal items they have inherited from them, such as photos, clothes, maps, books, tapes, objects, toys, legal documents, and even a pet turtle. The performers include those affected directly and indirectly by dictatorship. For example, Mariano Speratti shares the story of his father, Horacio Rodolfo Speratti, a member of the Peronist youth movement, who was disappeared in 1976. Vanina Falco relates the process of finding out that her father, Luis Falco, illegally appropriated and concealed the identity of her brother, Juan Cabandié. Liza Casullo tells the story of her parents’ forced exile under dictatorship. And Blas Arrese Igor describes his father’s original vocation as priest.

Unlike the plays of the Teatrolaidentidad festival, framed by the mission of the Abuelas and dealing primarily with themes of restitution and identity of Argentina’s youth, *Mi vida después* is the last in a series of plays staged as part of the theatre project Biodrama, created by the director

Vivi Tellas. Founded in 2001 and housed at the Sarmiento Theatre in Buenos Aires, Biodrama investigates the lives of real, living Argentines.¹ Directors invited to participate in the project develop plays starting from this biographical premise. Notable works include *La forma que se despliega* (2003, The Unfolding Form), a play about family tragedy and loss, by Daniel Veronese; *El aire alrededor* (2002, The Surrounding Air), a work based on the life of a woman, Mónica Mabel Martínez, from the Argentine provinces, by Mariana Obersztern; and *Javier Daulte’s Nunca estuviste tan adorable* (2004, You Were Never so Adorable), inspired by the director’s memories of his mother’s family. Tellas explains, “Biodrama se inscribe en lo que se podría llamar el retorno de lo real en el campo de la representación” [Biodrama inscribes itself in what could be called a return of the real in the field of representation].² Oscar Cornago attributes the renewed interest in documentary film, theatre, and television to this quest to move beyond a fictive framework and reassert the real.³ As a response, in large part, to our technologically mediated lives, recent documentary theatre, according to Cornago, presents subjectivity as presence, the expression of human life in its most reduced form (5). This emphasis on the physical echoes Tellas’s remark that she likes to envision the project as a body incarnating its own biodrama.⁴

Though initially created in the framework of Biodrama, critics note that at its premiere Arias’s play seemed distanced from the project, which is curious, given that *Mi vida después* presents an exceptional range of playful, original techniques to rethink or “remake” past lives.⁵ The play opens with a cascade of used clothes falling on the empty stage in a heap; the first scene providing a tangible reference to the contours of the bodies of both the parents and the children who will play and dress up in the clothes throughout the play. The last to fall on the heap of clothing is Liza, who then stands up and walks around the stage with a pair of Lee jeans, with her hands in the pockets, telling the audience that when she was seven years old she used to try on her mother’s jeans. Twenty years later she finds another pair of her mother’s jeans from the seventies that is exactly her size. She says, “Me pongo el pantalón y empiezo a caminar hacia el pasado. En una avenida, me encuentro con mis padres cuando eran jóvenes. Yo joven y ellos jóvenes nos vamos a dar un paseo en moto por Buenos Aires” [I put on the jeans and start to walk into the past. On a street, I run into my parents when they were young. I am young, and they are young, and we take a motorcycle ride around Buenos Aires].⁶ Liza’s opening

lines announce some of the key temporal and spatial juxtapositions the play highlights between the parents’ and children’s generations. Throughout the play, characters make references to their age and the fact that they are now as old as their parents were in the seventies. They reenact/imagine scenes from their parents’ past, like when Liza pretends to be reading the news broadcast her mother used to deliver in the seventies, or when Mariano appears as his father, dressed as a race car driver (6, 10). The play constantly creates parallels between generations without suggesting a melancholic identification with the past, an identification Arias explicitly strives to avoid in her play, distinguishing her work from more somber plays dealing with similar themes such as Marcelo Bertuccio’s *Señora, esposa, niña y joven desde lejos*.⁷ If one insisted on finding signs of melancholy in *Mi vida después*, it would be in the impossible form of anticipatory melancholy, deriving from an imagined identification with the future, not the past, in which performers predict their deaths. For example, in the scene titled “El Día de mi Muerte,” Pablo announces,

I die October 3, 2030, hanged from an *ombú* tree like a melancholy gaucho without children. The plains will be devastated by single-crop farming, the cows will be born sick and the horses with one hoof. There will only remain a few drugged *gauchos* dancing *malambo*.

The announcements at the end of the play (originally titled *Mi vida futura* [My future Life]) instigate a shift from post-memory to prememory, emancipating characters from the notion of the past as dominant referent in their lives.⁸ Arias’s performers position themselves in relation to the past, present, and future, focusing less attention on the idea of aftermath and more on the idea of a continuum of experience, shaped both by the reinterpretation of past events and the speculation of events to come.

Allusions to historical events abound in Arias’s play, though they are always linked to the performers’ biographies and portrayed through a highly subjective lens. For example, in the beginning of the play, in the first chapter titled, “El día en que nací” (The Day I was Born), performers twin their births with landmark news items occurring at the same time. Vanina announces, “Muere Perón y nazzo yo, después de un parto de 14 hs” [Perón dies and I am born after a fourteen hour labor]. Later, in the section “Fast Forward/Autobiografías,” Mariano tells audiences, “2009. Crisis económica mundial. A mi segundo hijo le sale su

primer diente" (1009. Global Economic Crisis. My second son gets his first tooth) (24). Silka Freire, in discussing documentary theatre, identifies this constant appeal to historical referents and a common "extratext" as a strategy for engaging spectators in the creation of a "pseudo-fictional discursive universe."^{IX} The playbill likewise comments upon the transformative power of this kind of pseudo-fictional universe, "*Mi vida después* transita en los bordes entre lo real y la ficción, el encuentro entre dos generaciones, la *remake* como forma de revivir el pasado y modificar el futuro, el cruce entre la historia del país y la historia privada" [*Mi vida después* travels in between the real and the fictive, the encounter between two generations, the remake as a way of reviving the past and modifying the future, the intersection between national and private history].^X

Arias, a poet, writer, and songwriter in addition to being a playwright, is very adept at developing her characters' stories and multiple points of view through language, but, as Pamela Brownell observes, some of the most imaginative trademarks of her dramaturgy, instead, relate to largely non-verbal strategies such as the incorporation of multimedia, music, choreography, and objects onstage.^{XI} In *Mi vida después*, verbal and non-verbal techniques combine to articulate a vast range of performative registers and perspectives. Brownell identifies four levels of performance in the play, corresponding to 1) autobiographical testimony; 2) a "remake" or reconstruction of the parents' youth; 3) role-playing of the other performers and their parents, and finally, 4) action, or moments of "pure performance" (5). These moments of "pure performance" introduce chance and the uncontrollable in an unthreatening way. In *Mi vida después*, for example, in the scene "La tortuga de mi padre" (My father's turtle), Blas tells Carla that his mother believes turtles can predict the future. Blas draws "Yes" and "No" on the floor and they ask the turtle if in the future there is going to be a revolution in Argentina.^{XII} Of course, they cannot predict which way the turtle will go, but the turtle's "response" affects the narrative of each individual performance.

Another way Arias introduces the element of chance is by involving a young child in the performance. Mariano's son Moreno, aged four, has a key role in several scenes; for example, in a moving moment, when Mariano and he listen to recordings of his father's/grandfather's voice together onstage, and when Moreno sprays the performers with water guns at the end of the play when they are announcing their imagined deaths (18, 24). Arias is known for

including children in her work. Her play *Airport Kids* (2008), created in collaboration with Stefan Kaegi of Rimini Protokoll, explores the world of eight to fourteen year old "global nomads" whose peripatetic lives have shaped their definition of home.^{XIII} In *Striptease* (2007), a play forming a trilogy with *Sueño con revolver* (*Revolver Dream*) and *El amor es un francotirador* (*Love is a Sniper*), there is a baby present onstage during the entire performance, crawling around, playing with her toys and making baby sounds. In discussing *Striptease*, Arias reflects upon the baby's presence on audiences, "Yo me fui dando cuenta de eso en el proceso de trabajo, el temor no es por el bebé, sino por aquello que no se puede controlar, tal como es el mecanismo de esta obra: lo que sucede realmente sucede, pero a la vez es ficcional" [I began to realize in the process of working that the fear is not because of the baby, but rather because of that which one cannot control, just like the mechanism of this play: what happens really happens, but it is also fictional].^{XIV} Arias's strategies for incorporating unpredictability generate awareness in spectators of the lack of control that characterizes human life, and of the fragility that not only defines humanity, but also the narratives that transmit human experience from generation to generation.

- i Forming part of the Buenos Aires Theatre Complex (Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires), the Sarmiento Theatre has the reputation for staging more experimental plays.
- ii Tellas quoted in Moreno, "Padres nuestros," 1.
- iii Cornago, "Biodrama: Sobre el teatro de la vida y la vida del teatro," 5.
- iv Alejandro Cruz, "Vivi Tellas abre su personal archivo," *La Nación*, July 30, 2008.
- v Alejandro Cruz, "Vidas marcadas, vidas contadas," *La Nación*, March 22, 2009. In describing *La vida después*, Arias repeatedly refers to the idea of a "remake" of the lives of the parents. Juan José Santillán, "Un abanico de historias generacionales," *Clarín*, March 16, 2009.
- vi Arias, *Mi vida después*, 1.
- vii María Moreno, "Padres nuestros," *Página 12*, April 26, 2009.
- viii Brownell, "El teatro antes del futuro: sobre *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias," 11.
- ix Freire, Silka. "Teatro documental: el referente como inductor de lectura," 5.
- x Playbill text quoted in Pamela Brownell, "El teatro antes del futuro: sobre *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias," 1.
- xi Brownell, "El teatro antes del futuro:

- sobre *Mi vida después* de Lola Arias," 1.
 xii Arias, *Mi vida después*, 19.
 xiii http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/web-site/en/project_3479.html. Accessed February 6, 2010.
 xiv Interview with María Fernanda Pinta, "Escenas de un discurso I. Entrevista a Lola Arias," 6. ■

INDI GEST

PULLING STRINGS, POLISHING THE STONE Carlos Pedragosa

Knowing how to pull strings is a total craft. Some are so delicate that they break, others never end, some get lost or tangled and others are just there but not seen. Knowing how to pull strings can turn a mere intuition into an idea or even a proposal. And it is in this delicate exercise of constant doing-and-undoing where the work of the Indi Gest company is situated.

Since I come from the world of music and have had no theatrical training beyond my experiences with Indi Gest, it's not my place to talk about the company's contribution to the theatrical scene, about the place it occupies or the sources that feed it. With regard to Indi Gest I can only talk about the experience in process. About its own particular doing-and-undoing. In this case, talking about the process means talking about the end aim, because in creative theatre, the *How* forms an essential part of the meaning of the work.

When Indi Gest pulls the strings it seeks transversality in all directions and in all senses. And from this apparent mess emerge points of intersection that become starting points. Movements, words or music interfere or overlap and weave a *What* of many layers and levels. A *What* installed between polyphony and pastiche. And the fact is that opening a way through the indigestion, turning the indigestion into a creative process involves converting the excess of our times into a cry for survival, which at the same time is no more than a sharp tool.

Therefore, in addition to pulling strings, it is necessary to be familiar with the craft of polishing stone. The work of the company is that of miner and silversmith at the same time. From chipping at the stone to converting it into a *multifaceted piece*. From the extraction of the materials to the composition, Indi Gest has the skill to know how to enlist a group of creators from different disciplines in a work process as participatory as it is diverse, where everything depends on the hand of the crafts-

man and the eye of the learner. And it is from this collective work of doing-and-undoing, and chipping-and-polishing that the work emerges.

PROMETEU NO RES Jordi Oriol

Gesture of an Indian

The shows *Concert per a sis oficinistes i un lloro* (2006) and *OB-sessions* (2007) – one, written as a commission; the other as a final-year project at the Theatre Institute – created the fruit that generated the Indi Gest company. These were the first shows in which all of us who today form part of the company took part. These two were followed by *La Caiguda d'Amlet*, which meant the reaffirmation of the collective in legal terms, and probably also an evident inclination for stage shows that were not exactly "radical" but were distant from the general theatrical tendency. And the fact is that, although we have not agreed any homogeneous aesthetic that defines the company's intentions, we are united by our desire to experiment and look to find new ways of saying or focusing things. For me – particularly – Indi Gest has meant a research platform and creation laboratory, mixing gesture, word and music, to make the form into content and the content into form. I like to write precise scores to be able to – afterwards – cut them up, wrinkle them up and strip them, allow them to play and look to play the fool. Today, we have produced a dozen theatrical shows, various installations, concerts, shorts and other artistic experiments; we have been maintaining – for the last couple of years – premises with a rehearsals room and construction workshop; and luckily we still want to carry on experimenting and learning, looking not to throw in the towel but continue fighting to make ourselves a small – but solid – place. The company's previous show *Un tal ímpetu vital* (premiered last season here at the Teatre Lliure) represented a major endeavour and a step forwards in the company's consolidation.

About nothing

Probably the initial driving force to promote this latest project from Indi Gest was generated by Silvia, who proposed a new work of creation doing without the usual prior writing of an original text and focussing fully on a much more plastic and visual premise. As if she had read my thoughts. A change of air always renews the creative spirit and the truth is that – lately – after suffering such mental exhaustion because of forcing myself to write semi-finished texts before the first day of rehearsals, I had been possessed by the fear of tackling alone – once more – a blank sheet. And now that I reflect on it, I realise that – probably in an uncon-

scious way – this is perhaps one of the things that *Prometeu no res* stresses: the need for a blank sheet from which to start over again. And yes, it is still a trick, but Silvia's advice was promising, it reached me like a gift from the gods that I couldn't turn down. And to look to begin from nothing, there could be nothing better than being three. This was how we came to propose to our friend Diego, creator and accomplice in similar concerns, to complete the basic creation team. And from there on, make heads fly, stomachs eat and all the rest shit.

Ca-ca caucusus

Searching for a common path, seeking orientation, the material on which to treat, we bumped into the mythical *Prometheus*, who moreover – if you have him minimally in mind – you can never end up avoiding. Illuminated by his divine flame, we decided to rob him of the polyhedric drama. A point on the horizon to travel towards. In the legend, Prometheus is punished – for having stolen fire from the Gods and given it to men – chained above the rocky Caucasus, punished to be eternally tortured by an eagle that eats his liver. In *Prometeu No Res*, we exchanged the rocks of the inhospitable Caucasus for ceramic tiles and furniture – Roca – which defined a washbasin, also desolate, where we find our "hero" wandering, whose torment – located in his stomach – keeps him near the toilet bowl. The lavatory (like the Caucasus) is still a landscape prior to culture, a spot of solitude, isolated from society, where everyone sees themselves reflected and cries over divine injustice while emptying their darkest and most putrid interior. The hero, therefore, is retained in this arid place, as happens with Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, or Beckett's *Happy Days* where, somehow (and by chance), as is also suggested in our *per-version*, the main character appears buried under the earth and ends up buried up to her neck, kissing a revolver carried in her bag, cursing herself for not being able to put an end to her own life; knowing that she is condemned to live thus (up to her neck in shit) until the end of her days. Had it not been for *Prometheus* (symbol of unease, inciter of "knowledge" in men), perhaps now she would not curse because, as Sophocles already said – the sweetest life is thinking about nothing. Nothing.

Promised a lot

I would dare to say that our generation has been fed with false promises and is now full to the point of indigestion, to the point that we know we all find ourselves lost, wandering without any clear

destination. The stability we suckled from our parents has gradually melted like the polar ice caps. The hope that – during all these difficult times – our ancestors had maintained trapped (within Pandora's box), now escapes before the passive stare of the virtual reality man. What emerges, then, is insecurity, due to the feeling of not being identified with anything, the uncertainty of the future. The man continues lost but – perhaps for the first time – he no longer has a North to follow. Teo and Epi, the protagonists of our play, find themselves in this disoriented situation, in a world where making a promise does not mean anything at all, where sworn oaths no longer have any value. If promises exist they are – rather – for breaking, for going back on them. A world where the word is worth little, where the eternal causes are cooling down in parallel with global warming. It is for this reason that the brothers Teo and Epi, inspired by the myth, have proposed to find a solution. Recovering the lost *north*.

Going cultural

If in the Greek myth, the Gods – who *Prometeu* (Prometheus) tackles – are a privileged few who are rather high up, in *Prometeu no res* they are a bunch who end up rather down, just because the Gods stopped being important from the moment that *Prometeu* confronted them. Therefore, now it is humanity (which sees and knows – at all times – everything that is happening) which has become God; now the omnipresent is the audience which goes to the theatre to watch what they call "culture". These are the ones who will now punish our new *Prometeu* to make him change opinion, to stop being so stubborn about changing the world and leave everything as it is now. The audience is who can be seen beyond, who can relate the appearance of our woman (half woman, half fish) with Io (woman converted into a cow, who appears in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*), or with Pandora (creation, precisely of the Gods, to punish men; of the audience, to punish the characters), of a suspicious beauty and seduction, like those of a mermaid and her charms. Deep down, it is the audience who ends up filling in the blank spaces, who disenfranchises the body of the work – with its culture – in order to make it "art".

Mysterious north

This is, for me, one of the keys of the artistic work. A good objective. Managing to leave the exact amount of space, the holes necessary, for the audience member to fill them. Heading it using all five senses towards what is inexplicable, a

catalyser of emotions. Maintaining these voids, these dark zones, hidden, it is allowed that the spectators be who, with their imagination, discover them, that digesting it all the mystery is revealed. Perhaps it is for this reason that Einstein said that *"the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious"*. This is, I think, one of my objectives; a reference for situating myself and orienting myself. It must be for this reason that I work in "theatre"... the constant mystery of not knowing what will happen.

PLAYING THE FOOL Diego Anido

The pressure one may bring to bear doing "what one likes" can be very high volume. I like "playing the fool", but that does not mean receiving pressure, not unless I act too clever, of course.

My parents tell their friends that their youngest son is in Barcelona doing "what he likes," and what I do according to my parents yes, that does sometimes floor me.

If we assume that the audience has gathered in Lisbon today and is coming over here walking, they will take about two months to arrive. That's the time we have to ensure we don't defraud them.

And to achieve this, things have to be done the other way round to what I believe, because we have to adapt to those people who will come to see us.

This is where the suffering begins. What makes us meet is not a tradition or custom, it is a system of order, nothing more. We must say that that sacred ritual that we will do on "such a day" will be good. We have to lie talking about something that does not exist... that does not yet exist.

And I do not like that but ... it's the only way. I woke up on the morning of the 25th at my parents' house, not too early and with the typical festive temperatures, although at that time I was not yet old enough to walk around saying "my parents' house."

The highway between Santiago and La Coruña is 74 kilometres. My father could hack it in 35 minutes if he thrashed his Ford Escort XR3. And suddenly we were stopping at the toll booth. Paying with pesetas. As if 35 minutes of speed had never existed. My brother and I were sitting in the back. Relaxed. Each to his own. Because the years when we would smack each other had passed by. We didn't do it any more because it was starting to become premeditated and a little dangerous. At Christmas there was always parking space in that city whose activity on the 25th seemed to be limited to resting on the seashore. My aunt and uncle lived at one of its support points near

Orzán beach. On the way to their house we passed people who, like us, were escaping from the street to meet in apartments with other people and eat sophisticated hay.

After taking off our coats and leaving them in the entrance hall, greeting my grandmother and my aunt with kisses that left my nose impregnated with cream from some French brand mispronounced as though it were our own, after a few hugs, after all this ritual, I was free.

Free in that henhouse on the sixth floor overlooking the sea.

... Until someone says that lunch is ready. Hay. On the table is the hay. Steaming. Silent. Lying in the centre. Cooked hay with cooked potatoes for feet. Lax and prepared for slaughter.

All our eyes shine for a moment. A moment in which we are pure, we and all the people meeting around the hay in the other apartments. Pure, dreamers. Children waiting for the baby Jesus to come down from the lamp on the table, lie on the bed of hay and smile at us.

But the baby Jesus does not appear. He has never appeared in any of the Christmases I celebrated there, and, as far as I know, he still hasn't appeared. Having eaten and exceeded the per capita quota of cholesterol, there was still room for small amounts of alcohol taken in tiny sips, conversation with quips and smoke. Perhaps we were sad, already hopeless, because we knew that we would never set our eyes on the holy son of God in La Coruña.

Today is 19 October and all of us in the team went to a restaurant. It is the last meal before the premiere which will take place tonight.

We all agree that we have told a lie. It's funny and we laugh a lot about it. We pissed ourselves laughing last night at the hotel where we have been living together for the last week before the premiere. We laugh to scare away the fear because the audience left Zaragoza days ago and is now very close to here, at the "walls" of the city.

But there is one thing that keeps us whole, and it is the fact that we are doing "what we like." All of us at the table, the technicians who we will meet later at the theatre, the workers who dismantle the scenery... All of us... infected by a bond, a fine chain like the chain of a toilet that makes us happy to be here... doing things... doing things backwards ...

Today is October 19 and at the table, a silence is born in the midst of crossing conversations. We all look upwards suddenly and we see baby Jesus come down, at very low speed, disguised as a penguin. He is dressed that way because he, too, likes "playing the fool." ■

DAVID ESPINOSA

ABOUT MY WORK (ETHICS AND AESTHETICS?)

I have no discourse, for me art is action, it is a practice, it forms part of my way of exercising and understanding life, like playing tennis, like paella...

that is why I am increasingly less interested in the spectator angle, the passive individual in a chair, and the first paradox arises here because I think art is not in the doer, nor in the artistic object, art is in the eye of the person who observes, in his focus, it is the person looking who awards something artistic value, and for this reason what I try to show in my work is a look at myself and what surrounds me, the reality, not to reproduce nor represent it, but to manipulate it...

to manipulate reality through an ironic view, that tries to question everything that we set as standard, as a novelty or as an alternative, that aims to highlight the paradoxes and contradictions of human beings, their behaviour, what they build, what they criticise... and so what we consider as art and culture...

I don't want to stir, or denounce, or transcribe, I don't want to change anything... I am not a committed artist, I think the only honest complaint is the one we make about ourselves... I have doubts about being an artist, the usefulness of what I do and my need to express... I do not claim an active audience, nor a political artist, revolutionising the stage, decoding the language, I neither want it nor do I feel prepared for it, praise be to whoever does, they will be published in the books, they will leave their mark and it is important to thank them for it...

I accepted my mediocrity from the start, since I walked through the door of the drama school and saw that I was neither the handsome one, nor the one with presence, nor the body virtuoso, nor the acrobat, nor the comedian, nor the instantly likeable one, nor the radical one, nor the theoretical one, nor the clever one... I realized that probably I would never do anything important, would never triumph, and that made me enjoy it from the start, running with the peace of mind of the one who always came last...

I just want to continue practicing creation as a tool that keeps me alive, and perhaps sharing it will help others do the same, look around them and experiment, practice creating something beyond its impact or who observes it... Nor is it an art of action, it is doing my own art... it is assumed that culture

helps us get closer to the truth, existence, the world ... but the more I move away from the theatres, the audience, the closer I feel to myself...

and in this the new technologies play a fundamental role, allowing me to skip the rules of the game, and do it all in a homemade way, which becomes another great paradox... the more I tackle technology as a topic and tools of my work, more precarious and craftlike is the result...

homemade food... cooking for my friends ... I do not look at recipes, nor labels, or go to the supermarket to buy the ingredients that I imagine... improvising something with what is left in the fridge... there are thousands of ways of making paella, and two paellas never come out the same... I'm interested in the virtuosity of the awkward, and the awkwardness of the virtuous... happiness is an excuse to observe how I live, to look back and understand how I have done in recent years, to realize who I am, what I dream, what I say... and not take myself very seriously... not jump to conclusions... I love suspension points...

Felicidad.es

Continuing the search that was opened in the previous project *deliriosdegrandez@hotmail.com*, a work in which the tools were used to develop a stage action that spoke of triumph and failure, we want to turn the approach around and now use a stage language in a broadcast across the Internet. The show addresses the idea of happiness, that state of mind that sets the course of our lives, society and the world. We want to question in the play what makes us happy, what causes that wellbeing, contributing our subjective vision to try and understand a part of this complex reality, through the tool that is deconstructing the behaviors and relationships of the present, the network.

We are building a society that aims make happy as many of its members as possible, and yet technological advances, globalization and capitalism seem to be increasingly causing dissatisfaction and frustration. Thus we try to ensure that the questioning also covers the idea of "extimacy" which is that recent need to make your intimacy external and that comes with the boom in reality shows and web 2.0 (blogs, fotologs, social networks, etc.), how this modifies the idea of identity, that increasingly is constructed based on a public profile on a social network, and the emotional voyeurism generated as a consequence, showing, to illustrate our everyday lives, the place where we live and the things that we do.

A virtual theatre

The idea of the format arises from the difficulty of distributing the shows once premiered, of organising a tour that involves travel, accommodation and living expenses which often alternative venues cannot afford.

We possess a work space where we can prepare and implement the creations but not present them in public, so we decided to find a way to resolve this situation, to act within our space and be seen outside of it.

On the other hand we have spent some time questioning the use of new technologies, which are distancing the performing arts from consumer leisure and culture habits. We believe we need to integrate art disciplines such as dance or drama into this digital revolution which is transforming society at all levels, especially in communication, not just using video projection and computer use in the shows, but adapted to new production and distribution channels.

We are interested in exploring the idea of being present without being physically in one place, how the convention today, which is completely normal in most of the media, may affect stage work, an art of presence. So we think it is interesting for visualisation to be a regular at the theatre, a group of people gathered at a particular time in a particular place with a stage area in front of them. This puts the spectator in a very different time to the one we have when in front of a computer screen. Most people in this latter situation need contents to be brief, fleeting, that they grab you from the outset and do not loosen their grip until the end. There is little space for contemplation, which is the case when we decide to enter a theatre.

We want to get close to the sensation of live work from a distance, from the virtual image, which also initially breaks with the norms of showiness. There are no lights to illuminate the stage, no refined transitions, no virtuosity of the actor, no magic. Image and poor sound quality, as it circulates through the network, content in its purest form, which also can be cut, crash, restart, and that does not create a problem in communication with the viewer. Build the complicity of a chat with a friend, in which we digress and share our concerns, in which the notion of time expands and moves away from the emergency stage, in which often we dare say things we would never say face to face.

Absolute reality in the maximum fiction, this paradox posed by the Internet, which leads many to have unknown

friends, lovers who they have never kissed, and families who do not share a home, who get together in a chat to celebrate Christmas. ■

ALBERT SERRA

NOTES FOR STAGING A FRAGMENT OF THE BIBLE

13 Jesus washes the disciples' feet.-

¹ Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.² And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;³ Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;⁴ He rises from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.⁵ After that he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.⁶ Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter said unto him, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered and said unto him: "What I do thou know not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."⁸ Peter said unto him, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."⁹ Simon Peter said unto him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He that is washed need not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all."¹¹ For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, "Ye are not all clean."¹² So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, "Know ye what I have done to you?"¹³ Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.¹⁷ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

Jesus denounces the traitor

¹⁸ I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eats bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.¹⁹ Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receives whomsoever I send receives me; and he that receives me receives him that sent me."

"Jesus washes the disciples's feet" (Jn 13.1 to 20).

The rationalizing and suggestive capacity of the word in literature, ie, in written language, is unsurpassed. The suggestive capacity, that is, the expressive capacity to attain the complexity of world, literature and the act of reading can give us the highest degree of riches.

The capacity for rationalizing, organising and systemising of the causal system that governs the world (or justification for its absence), which we might call *narrative* capacity, is also given to us in the highest degree by literature.

What remains is the aesthetic capacity. In this case the superiority of the written language is not so clear, and were it not for the fact that this capability can only be linked to the previous two in literature, it is difficult to assert the superiority of the written language.

Therefore, it is clear that the aesthetic potential of the word is the only thing that may interest the theatre and cinema and from which some profit can be made, without having to be ashamed of the literary original. Personally I have reached the conclusion that in theatre, as has traditionally been established, the *dramatic* capacity of the word can be as or more intense than literature itself; and film is the *evocative* capacity (not *suggestive*, much more free, arbitrary, and that can create associations of a complexity that only reading can make us see) of the word which, in rare cases, it is true, can be of any aesthetic use.

Let us see this in this small fragment of the Bible selected.

As a reader, and a creative and demanding reader, there are a number of words or phrases that interest me and which are essential for me in this text: "Passover", "his hour", "depart out of this world unto the Father", "he loved them unto the end", "had given all things into his hands", "and girded himself", "basin", "but thou shall know hereafter", "have no part with me", "servant", "master", "the messenger", "whomsoever I send" and "receives".

From a strictly literary point of view of aesthetic considerations and leaving aside religious, philosophical, historical or social considerations, very important for understanding the text but dispensable in this

analysis, because I made it clear that to describe the complexity of the world with precision and imagination, literature is unsurpassed, from a literary viewpoint, then, these words or expressions are the ones I find crucial to the beauty of the text. You do not need much more depth, because in general the style of the New Testament, except the use of certain ambiguous and wonderful vocabulary, is plain and simple and without many syntactic or structural complications.

For each of us, especially those who have been educated in the Christian religion, what is the word "Passover" or what does it mean? A mix of unforgettable meanings, from childhood, holidays, laurel and palms on Palm Sunday already passed, of death and resurrection, of hope and doubt... And "his time", we know that is not his, but the fulfillment of the Father's will. Jesus will not pass from "this world" to the world of the Father: He will pass "from this world to the Father", because the Father is everything, he himself is the world that contains everything; and on dying we will pass "from this world to the Father" and we will not be with Him, but "in Him", as said after the moment of consecration in mass. Jesus loves his disciples "unto the end". Can anyone find a more beautiful expression to define the great love of Jesus? That the father has "given all things into the hands" of Jesus, is no more expressive in its peculiar *physicality*, than having "left all things in his hands"? And the verb "gird"? Isn't its sonority pleasing? And isn't it beautiful, the simplicity of what it means? Putting a towel around his waist to dry the feet of his disciples (act of submission and service), like any manual worker who puts on the clothing suitable for exercising his profession? How many times have we seen Jesus represented, either in this scene or on the cross itself, with only a towel tied around his waist? Does it not make us think about the old, dry Palestine? Or about the simplicity and truth in the way of dressing of classical antiquity? The descriptive accuracy and grace of the word "basin" to define the tool that Jesus used to store water, who can ever forget that? What Jesus does, will be understood by Simon Peter, "hereafter": when is "hereafter"? A little later, after a few months, when he is already dead? Don't we read this "hereafter" capitalised, such is its strength, and we situate it beyond our life and, even, of our human comprehension? Jesus is also a man, a body, and now we note further the beauty of the phrase "depart out of this world unto the Father", because Jesus tells Simon Peter that if he does not wash him, "thou hast no part with me". He doesn't say that he will have no part in his

group, nor in his world, nor in his kingdom, etc., simply that Simon Peter will have no part with him. Jesus is a man, but his body, like that of the Father, can contain all. Jesus, as God incarnated in man, in his ambivalence which is incomprehensible to us. He appears here with an expression so simple it is mysterious: have part with me. And why has the tyranny of politically correct language led to the disappearance of names as graphic and real as "servant" and "master"? Is not the subversive force of these words more valid than ever, no more necessary its constant reading? And even more so, if we consider that what Jesus does here is upset the hierarchy that exists between these two concepts, and puts the servant above the master. The analogy established in the text between these two concepts of "who is sent" and "he who sends", apart from the beauty of these two names, is very enigmatic and suggestive at different levels between them and in a paradoxical way, that of God (he who sends) and Jesus (he who is sent), which in a cryptic way we could understand as superior – the latter – to his father, an interpretation to which the text takes us in a natural way and which is even more subversive than the text of servant and master. But the great founding texts are like that: no one can grasp the true meaning (if they have any meaning) and therefore they are timeless and their reverberations can be endless. Finally we find the word "receives". It is true that the term derived, "reception", is today widely used and in contexts and meanings that are distorted and uninteresting, but the verb "to receive" in the original sense of "admitting to our home, in our company", has a strength and a community spirit that almost makes unnecessary any remarks on the last sentence of this text.

Up to this point, a small analysis of the aesthetic values of the literary text, as a reader a little sensitive to the finer stylistic points of the text.

Now I would like to carry out a little analysis of its cinematographic values, ie, those that can give a result visually more interesting than what is written, and I would like to highlight, a particular word when a fragment of the same (said on screen), and not its visual equivalent, is more interesting seen and heard than read, if any, of course, because I said initially that these cases are usually few.

As a film director, and if I had to make a screen adaptation of this biblical passage, I am interested in only three sections: a) ["Jesus] laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poured water into a basin,

and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel where-with he was girded"; b) "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" c) "*He that eats bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.* In the first case it is simply a visual translation of some elements that, seen, may be stronger than read. The beauty of the gesture of Christ in removing the garments, the grace and the pertinence of his body and his face and of all the disciples, if they have been well chosen, the classical iconography of the towel around the waist, etc., all this, the talent of a film director can translate better and reveal to us with more intensity and fantasy than our imagination can do as readers. But there are still two small details in this fragment, which due to their specificity *physicality* and their central role in the scene, the film image can set them in a memorable and indelible way: the sound of water falling into the basin and the morphology of the disciples' feet and, by extension, if made visible, the legs (are they hairy? Is the skin white or brown? Do the veins stand out?) and, very especially the knees, usually a part that defines a person's age and physical condition very well.

If to this scene we add an open window with a little breeze that enters and moves the clothes or the hair, or the long beard of any disciple!, then we are setting an aesthetic equivalent to the word perhaps artistically superior to the written description. It is curious to note how this same scene viewed in the theatre has no interest, despite the ontologically realistic nature that the theatre shares with film; because, I fear, the *physicality* of theatre becomes, nearly always, banal decorations and the staging, everything that does not refer to communicating the text, and which is often reduced basically to the actor's voice (not even to his body) and its relationship with the audience, should always be based on abstraction (why is the noise of water falling into the basin wonderful in a film and a nuisance at the theatre?). Of these three excerpts chosen, however, the last two are the most interesting because they are phrases spoken by a character and onscreen they could also be said by the same character, ie, they would be in the image in the form of a word and not in its visual translation. In the case of the phrase "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head," which Simon Peter replied to Jesus, why do I believe that this phrase seen and felt onscreen is better than read? I will try to explain. If, as I have done in my selection, to that point of the scene I have avoided dia-

logue, or at least the relevant and lofty dialogue that exists in the written text, of which there may remain a small gesture of reticence by Simon Peter upon being washed by Jesus, this has been to concentrate on precisely the purely physical elements of the text: clothes, water, feet, earth, hands... For the moment, we have still not heard anything in Jesus's speech to refer to his theological and doctrinary world. Then, however, before the words of Jesus, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," which should be introduced forcibly in order to understand Simon Peter's answer, and that suggests that this marvellous formula has an entire metaphysical content that I mentioned earlier, Simon Peter answers him: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head": i.e., to a phrase by Jesus that has a clear, metaphysical and even mystical connotations, but at the same time its origin lies in a purely physical (albeit symbolic) gesture of washing feet with water. Simon Peter gives a reply in which (perhaps due to his own ingenuity or for stylistic reasons of the text's author) he will dismiss the symbolic content of Jesus's argument and end up only with the physical part to the point of reaching a frankly eccentric extreme to ask Jesus to wash his head (a gesture, I think, that evidently does not symbolise any act of submission and service, not even of purification, as opposed to washing the feet. So, when we read the text, this contrast passes a little over our heads because, in spite of everything, instinctively, we identify the words of Simon Peter with the theological reasoning of Jesus, which is clearly reinforced by the three sentences preceding these two and all those that follow them, which influence very clearly this content. But if we see him onscreen when he utters them, and if up to that point what has filled our imagination has not been so much the lofty discourse of Jesus or the lofty words narratively introducing the text in the first paragraph and at the beginning of the second – but a series of purely physical gestures, and if at the same time we have Simon Peter before us with his long, tangled or dirty hair when giving his reply, then the contrast between these two imaginings, between the lofty and symbolic words of Jesus and the physical, ordinariness of Simon Peter, becomes much more visible and has a grace and a candor (a nobility, almost) that the written text will find it hard to make us appreciate. The third fragment chosen – the second in which the word is conserved as is – goes in the same direction of contrasting a spiritual world with a physical world, so

that the words that describe this physical world, by assimilation with what we have perceived with the senses in the image, take on a relief and an intensity impossible to perceive through reading. Suffice to say, however, that in this case the translation by the monks of Montserrat, which is what I chose, is not as useful as some others, especially the inter-confessional of the Biblical Association of Catalonia. In the first translation we read "*He that eats bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me,*" which is what the Scripture says; but in the interconfessional version the same fragment is translated "*He that shared my bread, has betrayed me first*". Even so, it is necessary to bear in mind that the Scripture fragment to which Jesus alludes, in the book of Psalms (41.10), the same monks of Montserrat translate it: "*Even the best friend, in whom I trusted / who ate with me, sharing my bread / has betrayed me first of all*". We see that when choosing the form "eating at the table" instead of "sharing the bread", there is a slight loss of the union of a spiritual reflection with a physical element, the bread, which however symbolic it may be for the Christian religion is still a traditional food and morphologically surprising to associate abstract ideas such as salvation or betrayal (it is not necessary to remember the fascination bread has exercised on religious painters through the ages). Does not being seated at a table, where people have just eaten (we are at the Last Supper, which despite being holy, is still a supper), having seen the table set with food, drink, etc., make even more evocative and mysterious the reference to the bread? Here, therefore, said by Jesus and seen there is also another interesting element that I can use to close the film view and open the theatre view: the reverberation of the words in a physical space. When Jesus announces with this third fragment that someone has betrayed him, automatically, if we see it and don't read it, the effects of the announcement of this betrayal begin to permeate the space, because we can observe (or guess, or even imagine, it all boils down to the same thing) how it affects the faces, the silences, the dead time, the objects, the reactions of all that physically surrounds this announcement. In film, these reverberations fill the atmosphere and make the word take on a deeper significance than it can take on if we read it, because from the text it can only reverberate in an intellectual or emotional way and can only affect other words, never physically objects or people. Put another way, words unintentionally show a collective

significance, and in theatre, this collective significance, when the word has been worked in a refined way, another can be added to it, this is almost impossible to achieve with film, and is based on the fact that, in the theatre, the production time is the same as the reception time: it is the historical (dramatic) significance. In always sharing the theatrical spectator the same time with the show being seen, it is natural that it is much more sensitive to the reverberations of the word, not in space as in cinema, where the viewer can be more sensitive because it may be closer to him, because of the characteristically detailed modes of cinematic representation; not in space but in time, the present and the past of the words, because they are also their present and their past for which it has, for this reason, a special sensitivity. My theatrical choice, for a hypothetical stage version of the same fragment, goes in this direction and I believe that they are the most indisputably unforgettable word fragments because they are representative, with an aesthetic quality linked to the superior *historical* truth which we can apprehend when we read them: a) "What I do thou know not now; but thou shall know hereafter"; b) "Ye are clean, but not all!"; c) "Know ye what I have done to you?"; d) "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you"; e) "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen." But the Scripture had to be fulfilled: "*He that eats bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.*" It seems obvious to me that these fragments have an impact on the truth of Time, and that this truth is much more powerful onstage than on paper. Analogously, but conversely, in the example that I have offered with the water falling into the basin onstage and that becomes unbearable to us, seeing these fragments of words in the cinema can turn out to be a traumatic experience, due to their rudeness and emphatic vision of history that the cinema audience can not share in any way. Unfortunately, it seems that the future, like the past, is not going to save us from reliving these two ill-fated experiences. ■

HEINER GOEBBELS

MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S NOTEBOOKS

Adalbert Stifter

I had never seen it looking as beautiful as it did today. I was visiting the forest-houses, and some

houses where some precautions were needed due to the disease.

When I was on the way back, and getting near the inn, at a place defined and surrounded by a few houses, I saw the communal well. It was closed off by some wooden planks and wrapped with things to retain the heat. This stood upright like a hill of ice, and they had not even cut steps in this ice because water had not come from the spring for four weeks. In the doorways of the houses, I saw that in the morning, the people had scattered sand or earth and a little straw on the slippery surface of the paths, so that nobody would fall, but the rain had covered it all with fresh ice. At the inn behind Dubs, I was able to shake off the ice that had attached itself all over my coat, as well as to my boots. The innkeeper pointed to my ice crampons with satisfaction and said that they were excellent, and on ice like that it was necessary to walk with complete assurance, and without them it was impossible to put one foot in front of the other, where everything was completely slippery and smooth, without risking breaking one's arms and legs, and there was no other way of dealing with it, because the ice would immediately form again. We had lunch at the inn and after we had eaten, when the sorrel had got its strength back and its horseshoes were sharpened, when our things were as free and light as when we had left home in the morning, we continued on our way.

I had to go to the forest-houses. When we were in the country, among the crops, we heard the sound of something falling, but were unsure of what it was. At the edge of the forest we saw a gleaming willow tree, and its solid branches were hanging towards the ground as if they had been combed out. We had to approach the forest by turning towards the forest-houses, across the fields and meadows. This forest appeared to us to be slightly frosted, but glinted almost imperceptibly against a backdrop of grey sky.

From the forest-houses, I still had to go to Eidun. I had some business to take care of in the first houses in Eidun. Once again, we crossed the fields to these houses. After leaving the houses at Eidun, we were finally able to start the homeward journey. After once again shaking off the ice at the inn in Eidun, as we had done at the forest-houses, and after the sorrel had been given some fodder and we had fortified ourselves with a drink, we went back to the sleigh for the journey home. We took a path which in summer passes through the meadows of Eidun, but which in winter is the path followed by all those coming on foot or by vehicle from Eidun, the forest-houses or surrounding area who have to visit the forest slop or upper grove, by virtue of it being the shortest. We only had

to follow this path for half an hour before meeting the road towards Taugrund and my home. When we were travelling across the meadows, we once again heard the same dead noise of falling, as we heard earlier in the day, but again we were unable to recognise it and could not say exactly where it came from. Finally, the winter trail met the road. We were very happy to be reaching home; the rain and damp that had penetrated everything were very uncomfortable, the ice that spread artificially over the earth and the fields was also most unpleasant, and it was impossible to walk on it without taking great care. One day, when we were tidying up the paths, the colonel said that we would not notice the benefits until the next year and those after it. I noticed them today, while my sorrel was pulling the sleigh along this long, firm road, which was flat everywhere. Who knows what we would have done today if the path had been uneven, sloping and full of holes as it was before?

When we at last reached Taugrund, and the forest spread out along the road, we suddenly heard a very strange sound, in the conifer forests on the cliffs to the right, which neither of us had ever heard before. It was as if thousands or even millions of glass tubes were being rattled together and with this confusing noise, moving far away. However, the conifer forest was too distant for us to recognise the source of the sound with any certainty. It seemed strange to us amid this heavenly and earthly silence. Thomas wanted to stop the sorrel, but was unable to do so immediately because on the icy road, the sleigh slid along with its own momentum and pushed the animal onwards, and also because the sorrel was happy to be homeward bound and obeyed each order to halt more slowly, and because on that day it was particularly keen to reach its stable. When he finally managed to stop it, the noise had stopped. But then we heard a weak rustling in the air that we had not noticed before because of the pounding of the animal's hooves, and this indistinct rustling was completely different from the sound that had made us stop the horse. We moved on again. We got closer to Taugrund and finally made out the shady opening where the road entered the forest. Although it was still early in the afternoon, and the grey sky gave off a bright light, as if we could see the shining sun among the clouds, it was nevertheless a winter afternoon, and there was so much shade that the white fields in front of us had already begun to change colour and twilight reigned inside the forest.

As we reached the place where we had to pass under overhanging trees, Thomas halted the horses. Just in front of us, we

saw an elegant spruce tree, curved so that it formed an arch over our road, like those prepared for as emperors pass by. The splendour and the weight of the ice hanging off the trees were beyond imagining. The conifers were like candelabra, from which countless candles of an almost incredible size hung downwards towards the earth. These candles all glittered like silver, and the stems were also silver. They were not all vertical, and many leaned in different directions. The rustling noise which we had heard in the air beforehand now became clear; it was no longer in the air, it was nearby. It was heard constantly throughout the entire forests, every time a branch or twig broke off and fell to the ground. What made it so disconcerting was that everything else remained immobile. In the midst of so much sparkling and glittering, not a single twig or pine needle moved, except when a branch swung in the air after some ice had fallen. Immediately, everything became calm once again. We waited and stared, although I do not know whether it was out of admiration or for fear of going further into the forest. Our horse certainly felt the latter, because the poor animal took a few cautious steps forward, which caused a few shaking movements that made it step back a little.

Neither of us had yet to speak a single word, and while we were there and looked around us, we once again heard the falling noise that we had already heard twice that day. However, this time we knew where it came from. There was an initial sharp crash, similar to a cry, followed by a brief sigh, rustle or brushing noise, and finally the dreadful sound of a thick branch hurtling towards the earth. The noise echoed through the wood and through the dense growth of branches that cushioned it, and there was again a clinking and cracking sound, as though an infinite mass of glass was being tossed and shaken. Afterwards, everything returned to as it had been, the trees stood closely together, nothing moved and the slight rustling continued. It was odd to see a branch or a twig or a piece of ice fall nearby; we could not see where it came from; we only saw the sudden glint as it fell - often not even that - but instead only heard the noise, and calm reigned as before.

Going through the forest was clearly out of the question. There might be a tree somewhere with an entire branch across the road. It would be impossible for us to go over it or to go round it, because the trees grew close together, their branches were tightly intertwined, and because the snow even reached the lowest branches and twigs. If we turned back to return the way we had come, and another tree had fallen behind us in the meantime, then we would

have been caught in a trap. The rain was pouring down, we were once again so covered in ice that we found moving difficult, the sleigh was weighed down and glazed with ice and the sorrel also had its own burden to bear. If the weight on any part of the trees were increased by only an ounce, it would fall, taking with it the tips of the pines, which would go straight through us like wedges. We also saw that the path in front of us was covered with broken fragments, and while we were standing there, we once again heard heavy falls in the distance. When we looked behind us, towards the fields from where we had come, as we had noticed throughout the day, there was not a single human being living creature to be seen - only Thomas and I and the sorrel, alone with the forces of nature. So I told Thomas that we must go back. He agreed. I got out, and Thomas turned the horse and sleigh round. Then he got out. We shook our clothes and freed the chestnut's hair from the frozen particles clinging to it as much as we could. On the sleigh, the axe, which we always carried with us, was an excellent tool. The ice appeared to us to increase more quickly than in the morning, but that was because we had paid it less attention in the morning, when there was more of it due to the rain, or the cold, or both. When our packages were more or less ready, we got back onto the sleigh and headed back in the direction we had come.

LANDSCAPE Christophe Triau

The show starts with two engineers using a sieve to spread a white powder over the surface of three rectangular drums before us, one after the other; then they have three plastic pipes through which the water will flow to dissolve it little by little. This will be the only time we see human intervention in *Stifter's Dinge*; in the background a scene yet to take shape: a collage of pianos in all directions, strings in view emerging like a pile of tree branches. "*A work for piano without pianist but with five pianos; a play without actors; a performance without a performer; a one-man show or any name we might give it*": installation or composition for mechanical pianos, sounds, water, lights and other things, *Stifter's Dinge* presents a landscape where man will be absent.

Deep, not panoramic, landscape in which one's sight comes up against three small surfaces of water and then, like on a horizon, over them the chaotic mass of pianos that the changing light will give shape, or the screen gradually coming down in front to spread the light, to filter the glow of a projector or be a surface for projecting an image (marsh and wood in a 17th century

painting) or for the light reflecting on the surface of the water before them. For what there is to see in this space devoid of man and in this time devoid of drama, are the events caused by these changes: traced geometric lines or a ballet of luminous rectangles moving on the ground, the light playing on the surfaces, a cloud of smoke rising between branches and pianos, fine rain falling on a smooth surface of water, the powder slowly dissolving in the miniature lakes to become soup, a final nement of carbonic gel like so many islands and geysers in the midst of immense seas, dissolving until the surface of the water is a white layer which then breaks up in a progressive thaw. A flood, snow, the shapes drawn on the flat lands or falling from the dome of the stage...

Climatic variations. Klaus Grünberg's stage device and the series of scenic sequences built around it set up a temporality that is no longer the activity of man, but rather that of a natural course.

No human action, no drama other than seeing, hearing and listening to the sounds, the moments of light and their expression in time; the time that shows them, the other time they reveal. In an hour and ten minutes, it develops the contemplation of a world in miniature in which we are shown the thousand and one tones of a winter afternoon (or of a whole winter, you no longer know), a never-ending changing landscape to explore (like unknown lands waiting to be discovered, whose disappearance Levi-Strauss laments in a summed up interview that crosses the show), and before which we are given the experience of a virgin sight. We must therefore see and perceive the "things". We must also hear Goebbels's musical composition: piano, human voices and "primitive" chant from Papua, Colombia or Greece, but also the sounds of plucked or struck strings, the air driven into the pipes, the crunching or clashing of one material against another. We must also *look*: the second movement of Bach's Italian concert in F major played by a mechanical piano while the water falls, the precisely-lit keys mute without fingers to play them; the movement towards the front of the block of pianos, playing all at the same time like a maddened machine, comic, threatening, impressive. Finally, they have to see: the surprising description taken from the *Carnets de mon arrière grand-père* by Adalbert Stifter, diffusely read in one sequence of the show: that of a scene on the edge of a forest entirely covered in ice, petrified-vitrified, crossed by the crunching and deaf sounds of the branches and the trees that break and melt under the weight of the ice. A strange scene in which disorder blends with beauty, fascinating.

(...)

Faced with, or rather trapped in, this winter scene, which seems the essence of the whole show, man is gripped in the experience of a release: that of control, their control and feeling of centrality. A view that implies a change of scale, causing a radical relativisation of man's place and therefore their opening to the specific infinitude of what surrounds them, of the time and space where they are located, of an autonomous natural order. You then hear the last lines of *Les mots et les choses* by Foucault: "so we can bet that man would be wiped out, like a face in the sand by the sea"...

It is this changing perspective that stages the artificial, miniature landscape conceived by Goebbels and Grünberg, which inseparably expresses (in an entirely *siftersian* way) the feeling of great infiniteness and that of a small infiniteness crossed by a multiple life: the awareness of natural immensity and organicity passes through detailed attention to every thing, to every phenomenon. And imagination is offered mountains, valleys, sunsets in the mist on a small stage in three small geometric drums showing lakes and seas. It is the finely chiselled and trimmed lights that allow them to be discerned in their counter light, rocky masses... Framing and micro-focus open one's perception, and through this, imagination. And so, in one sequence a screen is seen suspended from the bars as we stroll, while the light reveals some leaves on a tree, branches, a trunk, a forest, animals, hunters: fragment by fragment, the *Caccia notturna* by Paolo Uccello projected as a whole across the scenic space, but with details only revealed by the screen. The fragmentation of the view reveals the whole of the scene, the landscape, without ever offering it as such.

This is undoubtedly one of the things that calls for an attentive look at the many details, rather than the concern for catching and resolving the way it works as a whole, that the device, as global as can be, never appears as a monstrous machine and escapes the logic of the succession of effects and technological demonstration. The technical process of its conception is erased before the life of the object itself: the mechanism disappears before the organicity. This device, in all of its complexity, is formed by no more than the most elementary constituents: water, driven air, vibrating strings, light, associated with a setup that is certainly brilliant, but still no more than a setup: from the *cafarnaüm* of the pianos

stripped and stacked in the naive, charming simplicity of the experiences produced on stage, always remaining playful or childlike. What's more, it assumes its own artificiality in this factitious recreation of a miniature nature, of an independent unit that works as the image of natural scenery, with its screens, the projector beams and the large illuminated plastic drums surrounding the stage. To conclude, *Sur le théâtre de marionnettes*, Kleist wrote in substance that once the state of grace has been lost, being "barred" from paradise, grace can only reappear once awareness envelops the path of the infinite, and only with the appearance of infinite awareness or that of a puppet without awareness. The mechanical and technological devices conceived by *Stifter's Dinge*, in which ironically it should be the pianos that come out at the end to take a bow, also calls on the feeling of natural evidence through an absolutely artificial installation, through art.

And if the chance arises for the human subject to disappear at the end of one time amongst others of natural history, making man absent in this way does imply the recognition of man's finitude, but the created landscape remains visible to them. In the optical box of the stage, we spectators are offered it in an aesthetic relationship that turns these pictures into the object of dreams and fascination for the observing subject (to use Kleist's famous expression, it might quickly produce the impression of having 'cut eyelids') in a contemplation meanwhile unresolved (particularly the framing and assembly presiding the development of the show). In a blending projection, things maintain their full strangeness, their resistance to simple appropriation. Romantic and "post-modern" scenery at the same time reveals a world to see, and (with the world as *Stifter's* home, surpassing man, it is to live there and cultivate it for him) in the multiple, infinite life of which we are bound to form part, in a just measure.

After the performance, the spectators gather at the side of the stage to have a closer look at the elements and articulations under neutral light, drawn by the curiosity of seeing and dissecting the fabric. This is however accompanied by the feeling that this technical revelation will destroy the charm of the show. Nothing depends on it: the passage is connected to the many small elements that make up the device, but never reaches the whole, one's sight is still limited to details in a partial perception, the edges of the stage amidst the crunching, gusts and waving of the ever-moving mechanism, of its strange, perpetual life, like a forest on whose edge we walk. ■

BERLIN

URBAN ODYSSEY Melanie Goodfellow

In 2003 multimedia directors Bart Baele, Yves Degryse and Caroline Rochlitz embarked on an ambitious project aimed at capturing some of the world's most fascinating towns and cities. The three city hoppers talked to Melanie Goodfellow about the work-in-progress.

What do the divided city of Jerusalem, the Inuit capital of Iqaluit in northern Canada, the abandoned mining town of Bonanza in the Rocky Mountains and the Russian capital of Moscow have in common?

They are the first four cities to feature in an intriguing series of films by Antwerp-based multimedia directors Bart Baele, Yves Degryse and Caroline Rochlitz who work under the joint name of Berlin. The trio came together after actress Rochlitz and cameraman Baele met while working on a production in The Hague. Baele then introduced Rochlitz to childhood friend Degryse.

'We each have our functions within the group. Caroline does a lot of the interviews and the basic production stuff, I tend to focus on the writing side and Bart does a lot of the more technical stuff, for example. But the key decisions depend on all three of us,' says Degryse.

'When we started Berlin in 2003 the idea was to create a cycle revolving around a series of cities or regions. The idea was to visit one place a year. Each segment combines film with some other type of medium which is dictated by the characteristics of the city,' explains Degryse.

'We took the name of Berlin because it is one of our favourite cities. It has a fascinating history but is also a place that looks very much to the future.' But, he adds, 'It can be complicated when we fill in film festival entry forms and put the name Berlin under director's name but that's the way it is - we're a three-way collaboration under the name Berlin - we can't put anything else.'

Jerusalem Chaos

Their decision to visit Jerusalem first was instinctive, say the trio.

'I think we were drawn there by intuition,' says Rochlitz. 'We were all fascinated by the place. It's a place I'd heard about as a child from the bible and now see it all the time in the news. It's the centre of the Middle-East - it's where the problems in the region converge.' Backed by a small ⇔15,000 grant from

the Flanders Community, the trio spent six weeks shooting in the city in May 2004. 'We'd done an initial one-week exploratory trip beforehand. Our aim was to get as many different opinions on Jerusalem into the film as possible. It wasn't too difficult finding people to talk to us. As one of the journalists we spoke to commented, the problem in Jerusalem isn't so much getting people to talk to you but rather getting them to shut up,' says Rochlitz.

'It was an incredibly hectic place to shoot. I didn't feel any pressure or sense of danger from the conflict except one time when we were at the market in West Jerusalem and there was an explosion in East Jerusalem at Damascus Gate. Our taxi driver started getting worried and said we had to get back to the hotel - it turned out to be a gas explosion,' says Degryse. 'We were staying in an hotel in the Old City. When we'd get back from shooting in the evening, I'd be glad of its thick walls. Not from a safety point of view but rather for the protection they gave from the chaos outside. I would wallow in the silence.'

The resulting work was a sort of big screen triptych featuring interviews with Christian monks and priests, Orthodox Jews, journalists, refugees, devout Muslims, pilgrims and Israeli and Palestinian academics against the backdrop of the Wailing Wall, the Old City Gates, a refugee camp and the checkpoints around the city.

Inuit Capital

After the chaos of Jerusalem, the trio decided it wanted to focus on somewhere a little more peaceful.

'Jerusalem had been so hectic that I wanted calm, silence, whiteness. We did some research and hit upon the idea of the new Inuit capital of Iqaluit in Canada,' says Rochlitz.

Iqaluit is the capital of the autonomous Inuit territory of Nunavut in northern Canada, an Arctic region roughly the size of continental Europe with a population of just 27,000. The isolated city, officially founded in 1999 on the site of an old US air force air base, is home to 6,000 people. 'It's an amazing place. Most of the year you can only get there by plane and the boat service in the summer is only for freight,' says Rochlitz. 'The Inuits are keen to make it work but if you don't work for the government, there's not much else to do. Old nomadic traditions have died out. Only a few wealthy Inuit can afford to go hunting and they tend to travel by snow mobile rather than the old-style dog sledges.'

At the screenings of the film, mainly in the *atres* around Flanders, the trio combined a portrait of life in Iqaluit with a live telephone conversation between Caroline on stage and an Inuit actor calling from the Arctic city.

'The conversation was fictitious. We got writer Ivo Michiels to put together a short script taking inspiration from the fascination young children have for Eskimos - but the actual call was for real. We would talk to the actor live every time by Skype,' says Rochlitz. 'The only thing was that no-one in the audience ever believed it was live, they were convinced it was a recording - however we tried to present it.'

Bonanza Rivalry

The trio were attracted to Bonanza, the latest addition to the cycle, by the fact that it is the smallest municipality in the US state of Colorado. This former (gold and silver rush) boomtown was founded in 1881 after silver ore was found in the surrounding hills and mountains. At the height of its prosperity, it boasted smelters, mills, hotels, saloons, schools, a brothel, a stagecoach service and even a baseball team.

'At the height of the mining boom some 40,000 people lived there but after the last mine closed in the 1970s the place was virtually abandoned. About 22 people are registered as resident but just seven people live in Bonanza all year round,' says Rochlitz.

The trio first heard about Bonanza from Nico Leunen, the sought after Flanders film editor whose recent credits include Belgium's Foreign-language Oscar entry *Someone Else's Happiness* and the award-winning feature *Khadak*. He put them in contact with one of the permanent residents called Mark.

'Mark agreed to let us stay with him during the shoot. He was the only one who knew we were coming. Once we got there, we went from neighbour to neighbour introducing ourselves and amazingly they all agreed to cooperate on the film,' says Rochlitz.

It was not long before the directors discovered that Bonanza was a hotbed of neighbourly rivalry, historic disputes and misunderstandings on a par with what they had seen in Jerusalem.

'At a certain point we realised that the residents of Bonanza didn't necessarily get along that well. It's not that we were particularly looking for connections between Bonanza and Jerusalem but on some level the way the residents of Bonanza talked to one another, the arguments they had were similar,' says Degryse.

'We discovered there were several long-running disputes going back 20-odd years. It's this beautiful place in the middle of the Rocky Mountains, far from the stresses of modern life, but in the end it suffered from some of the same problems as Jerusalem,' he adds. Local tensions escalate after some of the permanent residents

decide to challenge the fact that the local mayor does not live fulltime in the town but rather in the nearest city of Pueblo, some 300 kilometres away.

'She spent a lot of her childhood there and has strong connections with the town. Many of her immediate family are buried in its cemetery - her roots are there - but she doesn't live in Bonanza full time. The two protestors ran for office as town councillors and failed to get in. They don't see why someone who doesn't live in Bonanza should have a say about what goes on - in truth there's not much to decide there - it's a strange situation,' explains Degryse.

Multiple Edit

The piece is due to go on tour of 23 *atres* across Benelux in 2007. It will be one of their most ambitious multimedia pieces to date featuring a scale model of Bonanza and five screens representing each of the permanently inhabited houses. 'The audience will sit on the stage directly in front of the model. They'll be able to see the whole of Bonanza close up - where everyone lives, how their properties are spaced out. They'll see daybreak and nightfall over the town - lights will come on in the houses when the light begins to fade.' At the same time a line of five screens over the model will play interviews with the inhabitants, footage of everyday activities, as well as cutaways of the scenery and houses. Baele, is responsible for the multiple edit alongside Leunen.

'The audience won't be expected to follow all five screens at once. Bart is editing our material in such a way that only one or two screens are likely to capture their attention at any one time,' explains Degryse.

'There won't be any blank screens, life will always be going on - even if there is only minimal activity. I'll use sound and subtitles to get the audience's attention,' explains Baele, who spent nearly a year pulling the material together.

Even as Bonanza starts touring, the trio are already researching their next city of choice: Moscow.

'We've already started contacting people - usually we find that once you get in contact with one person, it snowballs,' comments Degryse. 'It will probably take us a year and a half to pull it together.'

Other plans include a separate cycle of films about rivers as well as a combined screening of all the city projects to date in a travelling circus big top.

And what about Berlin? Will they ever get round to making a tribute to their namesake city? 'Hopefully sometime in the future,' says Degryse.

Interview appeared in Flanders Image #07, spring 2007.

THEATRE: SCREEN OF REALITY
an interview by Gwénola David and
Jean-Louis Perrier with Yves Degryse and
Caroline Rochlitz

Somewhere between a documentary performance and a video installation, the “filmic theatre” produced by the Antwerp-based group Berlin explores and portrays our planet’s cities and towns, revealing like books what is happening in today’s world. After Bonanza, the group is now creating Moscow in Leuven and Brussels.

What was your thinking behind the Holocene project – a series of portraits of towns and cities spaced out over a number of years – when you launched it in 2003?
Yves Degryse: We wanted to talk about what’s happening now. Some directors start with a piece of dramatic writing; we start with a city. But the approach is still pretty much the same. Like with a play, we’re seeking to discover universal resonances at the heart of the small stories and people there. The town offers a depiction of life, the diverse human community with all its conflicts and contradictions. The people who live in the mare our characters. I [Yves Degryse] had already experimented on a kind of “filmic theatre” with the Flemish group SKaGeN, using framing and editing techniques and transposing dialogues from films and documentaries to the stage.

You’ve explored Jerusalem, then Iqaluit – the Inuit capital with a population of five thousand in northern Canada – then Bonanza – a hamlet with seven residents in Colorado – and now Moscow. How do you choose these places?

We have to feel that there are theatrical elements which have more about them than just superficial detail. A certain distance is also important. We question the city from very aspect, including its clichés. So we have to be able to discover it and look at it with fresh eyes. When we arrive, we’re just like tourists or children. The choice comes from our intuition and a plan. After the chaotic hustle and bustle of Jerusalem, we were looking for silence: we looked north and found Iqaluit on the map. Then we wanted to explore an even smaller community and a friend mentioned Bonanza. We found out about it and decided to go there. We try to sketch out the path we’ll take and then see where chance takes us. Ideally we’d like to wait, do some work on a city and then determine the next stage.

How do you discover a place?

We work in three phases. We read up a lot about it to confirm our intuition before going there. Then all three of us go on

location for a fort night. We go to places and meet local people who are going to steer our research and open up new ideas. Then we come back with the entire crew to film over two periods, each lasting a month.

At what point do you come up with the stage form of the show?

From the start of the *Holocene* project, we wanted to study each place by figuring out what was specific about it and then defining the most appropriate aesthetic form and stage tools to reproduce its character. We wanted to remove ourselves from this mania for categorising disciplines because it confines an approach to a means of expression, where as our expectations, our “states of being” and our creative imaginations change. In concrete terms, the form starts to take shape after our stay on location – so before the first shoot – because the stage device, number of screens, their mobility etc. have a huge influence on the way we film. During the second period of filming, we’ve decided on the form and we can add to the material we’ve collected as required.

How do you choose who you interview?

It all depends on the town. In *Bonanza*, we drank lots of coffee with the residents! To start with, we just talked and then we gradually introduced the camera. We obviously couldn’t do it like that in a capital city like Moscow with a population of ten million. The approach is more theoretical. We never do an interview in the street because that’s more like reporting or TV. We determine the direction we want our work to go in and the types of “character” who seem to us to represent the city’s various social, political, religious and cultural positions etc. We contact people who in turn put us in touch with others. We ask to talk to them for at least an hour. We’re often surprised by getting answers that weren’t what we were expecting. The discussions follow a precise framework, with questions common to everyone and other, more specific ones. For example with *Moscow*, we asked everyone: “*Is Moscow a circus?*”

You encounter a variety of different points of view in it, like pieces in a mosaic. Do you use the same questions to highlight the divisions and the various different ways of looking at things?

Yes. The portrait is compiled from images of it given to us by its residents. Then we forget about the questions that have guided our work and everything else that seems superfluous to us. The spectator doesn’t see what was in place for collecting the words and images.

Being somewhere between documentary cinema, theatre and an installation, could we say that your shows fall within the term “documentary installation”?

Being artists, that’s not a question we ask ourselves. We do portraits, whether they’re documentary, theatre or dance. We propose devices that play with different dramaturgies and audience relationships. *Bonanza* follows more of a theatrical path, with a narrative development, a beginning and an end. We refuse to think of it as an installation. On the other hand, *Iqaluit* offers a way of going round it as you would an installation: the spectators can choose how long to take and their path through it. The question of genre only crops up before the show: programmers want to know where to put us. Avoiding classification can be an advantage and allows us to present our shows in different venues and on different circuits.

Why start with reality rather than fiction?

Reality is much more surprising than anything we could have invented. Reality is stronger than any fiction. For the portrait of Moscow, we met no end of people who were madder and more inventive than us.

Yet putting together all these elements from reality in turn creates a fiction....

That’s done through the editing process.

You could imagine a random process of words being juxtaposed by chance, where as editing produces meaning. Are you trying to bring out the truth or a truth about a town?

It’s impossible. In *Jerusalem*, for example, everybody we met produced a well-argued and convincing opinion. There are several truths. In the end, maybe you’ll see our truth....

In documentary cinema, a point of view is expressed on screen through editing. Might the multi-screen device be a formal translation of your idea of a plural reality?

The people we filmed never spoke to one another and each person explains his or her point of view. These words meet for the first time in a fictitious way thanks to the editing process: the person on the right hand screen appears to hear the opinion of the person on the left-hand screen. The stage device establishes a discussion between the screens and allows the plurality of what is being said to be heard.

Rather than the usual monologue on camera – on screen – you replace it with a form of “polylogue”. Your works bear witness to a variety of simultaneous viewpoints, “speaking” from different places in the space, both literally and figuratively....

How we edit it and how we stage it reveals

the difference between our approach and a journalistic one. In *Bonanza*, each screen identifies one of the characters, who can be inactive for fifteen minutes while still being present. The inter play of images establishes the fiction and creates the relationship between the characters. It’s theatre, where as in a classical documentary it would be impossible to show a forty-minute wait at a checkpoint like we did in *Jerusalem*.

While one screen shows the reality from a single angle, the multiscreen device allows us to see parallel actions off camera or another side of what is being shown in two dimensions. Covering 360 degrees as it does, is it an attempt to capture reality in all its facets, in its entirety?

We film different opinions like a landscape, i.e. by increasing the angles of shots.

This polycentrism reinforced by the absence of any commentary, which usually has a unifying function in traditional documentaries....

The portrait has to be done by the residents, by the town... We act as revealers and we consciously leave things out.

How do you choose your devices, for example the large model for Bonanza?

We simply started with observation. There

were five inhabited houses, hence five screens. The people there had no contact with one another, but they could see each other from their windows. To enable the audience to see their isolation and their proximity, we came up with this model which is a site plan of the hamlet.

And for Moscow?

This city evoked the Moscow State Circus for us, doubt less because of childhood memories. Working on the circus is interesting for Moscow: in the past, it was something that produced amazement; today – and we looked behind the scenes – it signifies disillusionment and sadness. We’ve had a big top built, inspired by the domes of orthodox churches. There’ll be a string quartet, a piano and seven moving screens, carried by arms that will be moving the actors around.

You’ve gone from three screens (*Jerusalem*) to five (*Bonanza*), and now to seven for *Moscow*. Why seven?

It’s a reference to Stalin’s Seven Sisters. These historical symbols, now luxury flats and offices, reveal the clash between the past and the present. We asked people a lot about Stalin because his portrait is still very visible in the streets and parades. Nobody – not even in the artistic world or on the left – said to us: “*Stalin is a mon-*

ster.” All of them said that he did very positive things.

After visiting this city, what struck or surprised you in relation to the image you had of it before going there?

How hard the life and the people are. To be someone, you have to be hard. Muscovites aren’t interested in quality of life, just in money and power. They seemed aggressive and brutal to us. Everything is business. We wanted to interview people from the Nikulin Circus and they demanded ten thousand dollars. “*Circus is business too*”, they told us. The very romantic image of the circus coexists with a business sensibility.

You seem to be showing your opinion, a point of view. What place does this have in your portrait?

Recreating this impression is very difficult because Muscovites change in front of the camera. They’re not natural and focus a great deal on their city’s image. In fact, we didn’t try to show their mentality. It seemed more important to us to show the rise in the pro-Putin Nachi movement which is forming future generations. This will be “our” truth... our urgent need to speak out.

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