

CASE STUDY: CONSPIRACIÓN HAMLET - CASA DEL LAGO,
CHAPULTEPEC, MEXICO CITY (2012)

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The 2012 *Taller* production, *Conspiración Hamlet*, was an adaptation of Shakespeare's classic into a participatory experience.⁴⁶ The production employed many of the principal soliloquies of *Hamlet*, seeking to work with the themes of doubt, self doubt and lack of action. The production sought to consider these both in the context of the original play and in relation to our own lives. Both in the rehearsal process and in the piece itself, the mirror as object and metaphor was used to evoke various perspectives of an assumed 'self and other' for reflection. During rehearsals the actors were invited to consider how the struggles and ruminations of Hamlet could serve as a mirror image of themselves. The purpose of this reflection, besides being the groundwork for the creation of the performance score, was to make explicit the intention of exploring through the final production the notion of being true to who we are. *Conspiración Hamlet* asked participants and actors to contemplate what it would mean to be true to our destiny, which in Hamlet's case is a tragic one, and which, in our own lives, can often be sidestepped in favour of 'musts' and 'shoulds'. As with so many *Taller* productions, the intention here was to try to awaken, to choose 'to be,' rather than 'not to be'.

The play began in the woods of Casa del Lago, in Chapultepec. The audience were asked to join a circle. The rules of the game were explained: please trust us, please do as we ask, please play honestly, intently, and truly. Only this way may you find something of importance, only this way may you have a genuine experience.

The audience is gathered into a circle whilst the rules of the game are explained and a moment is taken to begin the play. They walk through the

⁴⁶ This is not a strict description of the play's events, but rather a reflection of the shape of the play. As such I attempt to echo its nature as an experience.

woods behind a guide, the one who will take them through to the end. They walk making the serpent, becoming once more part of a whole body, reminding them in movement of their belonging, of their interconnectedness to everything else. They are lead into the woods and through the golden gate - the gate of consciousness and awakening. Then, they are gathered around the great palm tree.

Here is Hamlet, for the first time, holding the frame of a handheld mirror with no glass in it. Hamlet speaks to himself, to himself in the audience through the glassless mirror in his first monologue. There are three Hamlets on stage, and in his/her mirror there are as many Hamlets as there are audience members.

[...] But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue' (*Hamlet*, I, ii, 158)

The serpent line gathers again, we walk deeper into the woods to find a path, to come to a castle. To find Hamlet on the brink of the balcony, having seen the ghost.

[...] Remember Thee⁴⁷

We follow the guide around the castle and encounter the players. The 'appearance' of life in all its banality, in all its melodrama and superficiality. But when shall we catch ourselves - we who are not even half as alive as these pretenders? When shall we find the courage of acting out our true needs?

[...] But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall

To make oppression bitter, or, ere this

I should have fatted all the region kites

With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain! (*Hamlet*, III, ii, 572- 575)

The guide moves forward, gives each actor their own sin to bear; the theme of life which does not let them fly free - which binds them by fear to repeating the same patterns of life, over and over. Hamlet speaks again:

[...] But that the dread of something after death -

The undiscovered country, from whose bourn

47 A play on the line, 'Remember me' (*Hamlet*, I, v, 91).

No traveler returns - puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of? (*Hamlet*, III.i. 78 - 82)

The guide beckons the audience to follow him. They enter the woods again where they are placed standing in a circle of which Ophelia is in the middle. She cleanses the audience members, one by one purifying them with smoke from herbs and sacred plants. Preparing them to trust the following journey walking blindfolded, to bring their outer attention inside. The blindfolded audience makes a serpent, and walks through the woods, onto a path, accompanied by song, up and up, and into the castle. Now everyone is invited to take part in action, in finding their own freedom to be. They are asked to walk in the space, alone, not next to whom they came to the play with. They are asked to find a place to stand to find their roots, to sense the movement of the planet in the cosmos. A drum is played, the audience is encouraged to find their dance, to liberate their bodies from resistance, to be free in movement. The music intensifies in waves, and the audience find their way back to being. The game is serious, one's life is at stake. What would you choose? To be or not to be? Each audience member is placed in a pair, facing each other, with their eyes closed still. They are asked to recognise the essence of the other, without judgement, through gentle touching of the other. Eyes slowly open, to see the other, to be with the other, to recognise their true being.

The pirates invade the space; we are not in the castle, we are in the ship that saved our lives! And the actors walk through the audience with the empty handheld mirror, whilst the question is asked, Who are you truly? Who do you see on the other side - is it other, or is it you, as much as you are him or her?

The mirror theme which appeared in the production, both in physical and metaphorical forms, spoke to the account of Tezcatlipoca - the 'smoked mirror' of Mexican indigenous mythology. It spoke of the necessity to work on our clear vision; to see further and deeper than our undisciplined minds,

our cravings and grasping. To see our true self, and in that seeing to see ourselves in the other. *In Lak'ech Hala Ken*: I am you, You are me.⁴⁸

48 This expression is a Mayan greeting which seeks to express the unity of all beings and energies in the universe. *In Lak'ech*, signifying: I am another you, and *Hala Ken*: You are another me.