

THEATRE AS A SECRET SOURCE⁵⁴

Nicolás Núñez

‘True culture makes life bloom’
(Antonin Artaud, 1976: 32)

What I am about to tell you is very personal. It is the reflection of a spirit in a state of emergency who grabbed onto theatre in order not to tumble into the depths of desperation to which the distorted values of this modern society have driven us.

The truth is that all of us on this planet, today, are consigned to survive in the time of the assassins.

My name is Nicolás Núñez, and for more than fifty years, I’ve been working in theatre research in my country - the land of the sun, tequila and mariachi. As Mexicans we are aware that our bandit lineage is what defines us to the world. Some of us burgle gold, others steal hearts, and some others, through art, attempt to take light by assault.

The context of my work is the relationship between ancient traditions and the sacred origins of theatre. Throughout the years, we have designed tools to raise our energy and cultivate attention in order to look towards the Sun; like *Citlalmína*, for example - a sacred Mexican-Tibetan dance for training actors, authorized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the General Teresa from the Mexican conchero tradition, or *Slow Walking* and *Contemplative Running* which were developed in the Polish woods, guided by the hand of Maestro Grotowski. These tools, together with our twenty-four psychophysical dynamics⁵⁵ – all of them meditation-in-movement techniques – form the training method of the *Taller de Investigación Teatral*.

54 A key-note address given at the International Symposium of Performance and Mindfulness at the University of Huddersfield, June 2016. Translated by Helena Guardia.

55 See discussion of the number of dynamics on pp. 225 - 227.

Our teachers have been Shakespeare, Krishnamurti, Gurdjieff, Grotowski, Artaud; also the Náhuatl, the Buddhist, Contemplative and Sufi traditions, as well as the teachings from Quetzalcóatl, and whatever we can understand from Einstein's intuitions. In Van Gogh's paintings we have felt the rhythm of the universe, and we have tried to be moved by this rhythm.

For us it has been of vital importance to be passionately faithful to our research; as Joseph Campbell said, to 'follow our bliss' (remember?); and to realize, thanks to Mircea Eliade, that theatre is the most ancient religion of humanity.

Anthropocosmic theatre, which started in 1975, comes face to face in this Symposium, with the search for 'mindfulness' in the West; a search which, for us, has been informed by people like Jon Kabat-Zinn, in the field of health; by Lee Worley, Meredith Monk, and Marina Abramovic, among many others, in the field of performance; and also by scientists such as Basarab Nicolescu, and his proposition of 'transdisciplinary cosmic verticality'. All of them have enriched our experience and work.

We are very grateful for this opportunity to share with you our reflections:

What is the real meaning of culture, of public health? What is the purpose of theatre?

But do not take too seriously what I'm going to say. Remember, I'm just a Mexican bandito!

From my very personal point of view, the ideas of culture, health, justice, equity, social and political organization have been, in this global society, completely misunderstood and - I think intentionally and wickedly - twisted.

It is clear to us, for example, that commercial medical care and cultural structures dance, amidst grimaces of mutual satisfaction, to the rhythm of the clinking coins. They happily sell their consciousness to the highest bidder, and everything, as the poet says, in exchange for a few 'copper coins and abstract shit' (Octavio Paz, 1957/1988). There are no more ethics; only convenience.

Imagine - the system tells us that to be healthy means, essentially, to be able to 'work' for the system's benefit. Of course! Astonishing! What a

terrible thing to say! Breton's howling was not enough. His shout, through Nadja's voice, warning us that we will never find the real meaning of life through conventional 'work', has not yet been heard. If we have to accept it as a burden - so be it. But to glorify it and pretend that this is the way life is? In the words of Octavio Paz - 'Better to be stoned... than to circle the grinding wheel that squeezes the substance of life, turns eternity into empty hours, minutes into prisons, and time into copper coins and abstract shit' (1957/1988).

Should we be healthy and fit merely in order to work like this? For God's sake! We shall be healthy and fit when we assert our right to do our *good* work, the work that celebrates life and makes us upright human beings!

Who or what has misled us?

Some clinical doctors and scientists, nowadays, pretend to play the role of religious leaders, enthroning themselves as the new prophets of the system, when it is clear that their real purpose is to serve only as mere adjusters of the public health, fine-tuning the big machine.

We ask ourselves: what is happiness in an enslaved society? To cherish the chains and bars of our captivity? To cheerfully lick our handcuffs?

We have novel and playful technology, disguised as evolution that makes our work easier, that gives access to information and communication, and besides all that, is fun! True, it works well, very well! But it also distracts us and makes us lethargic. We have become fans of this highly addictive media drug, which truly weakens us by increasing our frailty as we face the greedy beast inside ourselves, whose sole aspiration in life is to 'become someone' in this nonsensical society. Pure ego!

The serpent fooled us again and, once more, we did bite the forbidden fruit - take notice of the logo: we have gladly bitten the apple, and its electronic poison already flows in our blood.

We suspect that most of our cultural, political and medical systems play, wickedly and arrogantly, their role of watchdogs and nannies of this society, *intentionally* keeping us fearful, superficial and handicapped.

Mario Vargas Llosa, in his book *Notes on the Death of Culture* (2015), makes clear the difference between the consumerist culture, the snob culture, and the high culture. High culture helps us to grow, to mature and to free our mind. Is this system collaborating with it? Or quite the contrary? The system is promoting a pseudo-culture which cloyes and distracts us from the real meaning of life, selling us the idea that true happiness means only to be a winner, secure and comfortable - making us drowsy and violent.

And if you have some secret needs of any kind, the system advises: you better satisfy them under cover, for your scandal might awake our happy slaves.

To behave hypocritically, and to master a double moral is, they teach us, to know how to do things well. And that is the cheating ethic of our time, to trick the truth; the way, according to them, to happiness and success. We are facing the victory of the elegant crooks.

But let's clear things up a little bit: the real purpose of high culture is to be a tool for conscious evolution.

In this sense, which is our role as theatre workers? What kind of fuel do we offer society? Do we give them sweets - pure entertainment and show? Or do we nourish them - offering a space and a time, auspicious for going within to question and reflect upon themselves, upon life?

As you might know, a human being can live without food, but with water, for about forty days. Without water, we cannot resist more than two or three days. Without air we cannot live for more than four or five minutes. But, without mental impressions, human beings cannot be alive for more than four seconds.

We could say, then, that the subtlest nourishment for a person is mental impressions. We are receiving them all the time.

And theatre, as you know, is a source of impressions, an essential fuel for our health which should be considered, together with all the fine arts, as part of the basic food basket.

But let's be careful in the creation of impressions, for we must distinguish between fission impressions - impressions that break apart - and fusion impressions - impressions that create unity.

Both of them generate energy, but in a totally different way: fission breaks, fusion connects. Fission produces a feeling of isolation and, therefore, fear. Fusion, instead, brings about a feeling of unity. Fission is cold, frigid; fusion is warm and cosy.

In any human activity, by breaking and isolating, fission stimulates selfishness and fosters negative emotions. It hurts, causing suffering and resentment. It tears apart our social fabric, dividing us, making us the prey of hate, victims of a nihilistic and fearful wandering inside a labyrinth leading nowhere. Fission drowns us in non-edifying actions that stimulate a hyper-consumerism in order to mitigate the anguish of being alive, but which never really satisfy us.

A series of fission impressions, metaphysically speaking, turn us into zombies, who behave only 'by the book', blindly following rules and regulations which nullify human criteria, and create many other distortions: irrational violence, nihilism.

Instead of that, we are interested in a culture of fusion - in a theatre that re-connects and opens the way back to our true entanglement: an anthropocosmic, 'transdisciplinary', 'mindful' theatre.

The 'transdisciplinarity' proposed by the quantum scientist, Basarab Nicolescu (2002), is a contemporary scientific model that, in its research, takes into consideration the deep meaning of the flow of life, which is nothing more and nothing less than the consciousness of the transience of life, of the fact that we are here... just for a while, as the Nahuatl poem reminds us: '*sólo un rato aquí*' ['only here for a while'].

Free transit in our thought, speech and action, with no fear, with no other commitment than to honour the authentic hierarchy that rules the universe: that is 'cosmic verticality'.

'Cosmic verticality' is the awareness of a higher consciousness: it is the ladder that 'transports and transforms' you, the dawn of mystery. In it, the natural hierarchies flow freely in a very fortunate way, through the ritual structure which, as Richard Schechner said, 'transports and transforms' (1985: p.3 - 33).

Our theatre research adopts Schechner's premise of transporting the spectator through different external and internal scenarios, knowing that the impressions they might receive during this physical transportation will, hopefully, trigger in them an inner transformation, provided they live the process with 'mindfulness'.

'Mindfulness', this millenarian technique, now naked of all its cultural attachments, alive only in its virtuous innocence is a mental tool to raise the attention. It leads to a secular sacredness that today allows us to change our perception, to be aware of the speed and beat of this universal loving and gentle dance. Because this [indicating the Earth] is moving. The existence of the gravitational waves, as predicted by Einstein a hundred years ago, has just been certified.

Do you know at how many kilometers per second we are spiralling, in a vortex motion, around the sun, at this very moment? At 30 kilometres per second. In addition to that, the sun is spiralling around the galaxy's centre at 200 kilometres per second, and, on top of that, this galaxy is moving throughout the universe at 600 kilometres per second.

This means that we began this lecture thousands of kilometres ago and, in spite of that, the perception of many might be that nothing has happened here. However, without doing anything (pause), we are moving (pause), and fast!

Perception defines reality and builds our belief system. Once triggered, this system of beliefs is crystallised in a 'specific perspective of reality'. Right now, humanity is changing its paradigm, and we are about to understand reality more clearly. As Gorostiza, the Mexican poet says, life 'is a runaway dream looking at itself at full speed.'⁵⁶

And to become conscious of this runaway dream means the acceptance of a constant transformation. But do we know how far this transformation can take us? Maybe to the point of listening to the angels' call, to the mermaids' song, or to the music of the spheres, the gravitational waves?

56 From the poem, *'Muerte sin fin'* [Death without end] by José Gorostiza (Gorostiza, 2002).

'The rest is silence' (*Hamlet*, 5.2. 350).

It is known that sound travels at 343 metres per second.

If I tell you, Wake up! and you are more than 343 metres away, my voice will reach you one second later.

Awake! Even if my cry were loud enough to be heard at one thousand metres away, my voice would be heard 3 seconds later.

Now, if I told you, Awake! at the speed of light, which travels three hundred thousand kilometres per second, and if you were one million kilometres away, you would receive my signal three seconds later, because the speed of light loses one second every three hundred thousand kilometres.

But - surprise! The mental synapses make an instantaneous connection through the whole universe. Thought is the fastest and most powerful form of communication.

For this reason, and since the actor is a communicator, he or she has to know how to control the mind, because acting, at its bottom line, is learning to ride the wild horse of our mental wind.

McLuhan says that 'we are what we behold' ([1964] 2003:21). To mentally contemplate something, to sense it, either through an image, a sound, a feeling or a smell, mindfully, is to create it, and that goes hand in hand with Stanislavki's 'as if'.

Have I ever thought or felt myself to be the universe?

As actors, we need to educate and refine our mind with such precision that our thoughts become capable of transforming theatre, by *mimesis*, into a source of cosmic resonances.

I ask myself if it is possible for an actor on the stage, who thinks and feels themselves to be the universe, to expand consciousness to such an extent that we can perceive this universe through her or him. What do you think? Do you think it is possible? The truth is: yes.

In fact, we *are* universe. What prevents us from living this truth is only our rational, emotional trash - pure egocentricity and useless garbage. That's why when I see an actor on the stage, taking his place in the universe, when I

see him present in the living moment, I am able to perceive that fullness, the vortex of reality shining. Yes, there is no doubt, when an actor touches this level, by mimesis, he or she reveals to me the cosmos that I am.

In which school are actors and, ultimately, human beings, educated to remember that ‘we are universe’?

There is no more Eleusis; no more enrooted theatre; each time it is more difficult, in any artistic manifestation, to find our way back to the Source.

In the field of the performative arts, we have to insist on this because this is our way to health, to joy, to dancing the dance that dances and sings through us.

If we lose the beat of the universal rhythm, we bump and fall, disoriented and feeble. But if we go with its rhythm, its exhilarating enthusiasm intoxicates and enchants us. In that intense joy resides true health. So we can say that the poetic invitation to a cosmic stage is as important as penicilin.

Those who know say that through art you can recognize the authentic health of a nation. The roots of art in ancient México were engaged with cosmic principles - Tezcatlipoca’s mirror, for instance; the mirror of consciousness and inner growth.

This mirror allows us to intertwine our actions with the fibres of the universe, and the cosmic lattice is reflected in our eyes.

Can we look into each other’s eyes, please? [The audience look into each other’s eyes during what follows].

In order to reach our best level, first we need to acknowledge what is wrong in us. We need to realize, for example, that we are domesticated by the fear of being ill, of having no money, no certainty or solidarity; we fear that we will not be recognized, and we feel insecure, rejected. The lack of sense in life attacks us; we become violent and nihilism might appear.

During his last days, Octavio Paz said, ‘from Babylon to this day, there is no sense, there is only the search for sense’ (Domínguez Michael, 2014: 564).

Today we need to help each other in this search for sense, to recover our full and total action, with all its meaning, its basic goodness, strength and

color. We must get back our power to live and die flying in the feast of life.

Close your eyes, please. Get comfortable in your seat.

Inhale, exhale.

And ask yourselves:

Who am I? Truly, who am I? [Pause for reflection]

There is, indeed, a theatre that is a secret source. A transformative theatre based on 'cosmic verticality', whose axis lies on its universal ethics. A theatre that creates events as emergency spaces in which to breath, counteracting the suffocation wickedly produced all around us. Events as platforms to refine ourselves, to transcend our anger, our fear, our frustration and resentment; that bring us closer to our true self, to our sanity, to our innocence and contentment, in order to share with others 'the forgotten wonder of being alive' (Paz, 1957/1988).

Inhale, exhale.

Slowly, please, open your eyes.

I want to thank each and everyone of you for being here, at this very moment.

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