

APPENDIX II

SPEECHES

A speech delivered by Antonio Velasco Piña⁶⁰ on the night of 10th September 1984 at the Colegio de México, on the subject of Anthropocosmic Theatre

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What is anthropocosmic theatre? What characteristics distinguish it from other types of theatre? When and where did this attempt at differentiation from on-stage activity begin?

This talk will attempt to answer these questions, and I think the best way to begin would be with a basic mention of the fundamental inheritances which develop in the west what we commonly call 'theatre'.

Classical Greek theatre is, as we all know, the form of theatre which gives us the fundamental bases for the development of this art within western culture. Through the centuries, and particularly since the Renaissance, European theatre has been enriched with valuable contributions coming mainly from Italy, England and Spain.

So, since the beginning of this century, numerous thinkers had started to notice that in the same way as everything to do with the culture of which it was part, western theatre was sinking into a deep crisis.

Among the great figures who throughout this century have questioned theatrical orthodoxy, the most notable have been Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Brecht and Grotowski, whose powerful criticisms allowed us, principally, to acquire a clear understanding of the degree of decadence to which this artistic activity had stooped, and secondly to begin the search for a new path, whose direction would lead the theatre to regain its essential content.

60 Antonio Velasco Piña: Mexican novelist and promoter of Mexican cultural consciousness.

Anthropocosmic theatre fits specifically into these efforts which tend to achieve genuine recognition in theatrical material. The year 1975, UNAM's Theatre Research Workshop and the name of its director, Nicolás Núñez, are the three essential pieces of data which reply to the questions when, where and by whom, referring to the emergence of this new theatrical trend.

To establish the influences which gave rise to the birth of anthropocosmic theatre is a more difficult task, but I would nevertheless dare to state that the main one comes from the determinant influence exercised by the study of Nahuatlán philosophy carried out by the initiators of this theatrical movement.

In a similar way to the conceptions of other grand civilisations of former times, those developed by the pre-Hispanic cultures considered that between man and the cosmos there is a narrow interdependence, such that each is affected reciprocally by the other's actions. That is, in accordance with said conceptions, not only do the heavenly bodies exercise a powerful ascendancy in human beings, but to the same extent, what they do produces repercussions with important consequences in cosmic happenings. That is why the lives of the ancient Mexicans were orientated, as the foremost objective of their existence, towards the formation of a personality capable of harmonising with the universe and collaborating consciously in its growth.

This ancient ideal of trying to develop a personality so complete that it can even feel the bonds which link it to the energies which shape and support the entire universe, constitutes in essence the basic objective of anthropocosmic theatre, which can be said to be deeply traditional and at the same time radically revolutionary. It is traditional because it addresses once more the possibility of creating a time and a space different from the normal ones, a possibility which, as Mircea Eliade has so correctly pointed out, constituted the supreme purpose of all ancient cultures. It is revolutionary because in current circumstances an objective of this nature constitutes something completely novel, which requires whoever practises it to undergo a radical transformation of consciousness.

In the first edition of Nicolás Núñez's book *Teatro antropocósmico*, in the section entitled 'A Guide', various members of UNAM's Theatre Research Workshop relate some of the experiences they have had in the course of their work. I will mention a few sentences picked out from these narrations, as I feel that this material will be particularly revealing in showing us what people feel as they carry out this type of work:

Something happened within me which I cannot express in words, and I still do not know what it is. But there I can see the moon and its entourage of stars, lighting up the night, and the deep blue sky, fired by the sun. And there are we, seeking our place in the Universe.

Helena Guardia

They shook my soul with the sound of their snail shells. There was nothing more to think of; there I was, drifting with them.

Ana Luisa Solís Gil

*Here for just a while!
 My heart is a jewel
 of the wind in the form of a spiral,
 my snail shell sings,
 my body dances;
 it is in the Omeyocan.
 There is external abundance to be enjoyed.
 Here for just a while!
 You are here,
 they are here,
 we are here.
 Here for just a while!*

Juan Allende

I tried to be at all costs. I wanted to be in a constant here and now. I did not manage it, but at certain moments I think I existed and I was there. Something within me moved and was still. That is the mystery which I love.

Jaime Soriano

I think the deep emotion contained in these sentences clearly reflects the nature and aims of anthropocosmic theatre, which obviously exceeds the purely aesthetic objectives, to try to achieve through action on the stage objectives of a psychological nature, such as confronting the subject with his internal 'I', so as then to make him feel the bonding which links him to everything that exists.

The means which are used to achieve the aforementioned objectives are the same ones which have always been used for this purpose. Music and dance, song and the acting out of ancient myths, the focusing of the attention on the 'here and now'. In short, it is another case of the yearning of the human spirit to go beyond itself and set up a conscious communication with whatever is around it.

Finally, I would just like to mention that in no way are we intending to create a new theatrical orthodoxy under the name of anthropocosmic theatre. Rather, this type of theatre consists basically of a process of research, an attempt to open up powerful trends which, coming from the distant past, can become the renewing strength which begins in our era a real theatrical renaissance. I hope this lofty aim can be achieved. Thank you for your kind attention.

A speech delivered by Fernando de Ita⁶¹ on the night of 10th September 1984 at the Colegio de México on the subject of Anthropocosmic Theatre

To answer the question which has given rise to this speech, what is anthropocosmic theatre?, I feel the need to reply first to another question:

61 Fernando de Ita: Mexican theatre journalist and critic.

what is theatre in Mexico? The quick answer: it is nothing. I mean, nothing of any real interest to society as a whole; not even to that part of the social conglomerate which, as a professional obligation, should give it some thought.

A while ago, Professor Hector Azar was telling me about the startling contempt magazines and cultural supplements have for work in drama, at a time when the rest of the media confuse it with burlesque shows and spectacles. Theatre is that, of course, but it is, above all, something else. It is, or it ought to be, a place in which the artist's imagination takes shape in order to relate to the imagination of the next man.

Jean Duvignaud has said that theatre is the last sacred place available to twentieth-century man, because although people recently involved in theatre have striven in very different ways to remove the sacred nature from theatre, this act is nevertheless still a rite carried out in a particular place, at an exact time, under previously determined conditions.

This ceremony has varied a great deal in twentieth century western theatre, to the extent that straight after seeking in a thousand different ways to break with its ceremonial meaning, contemporary theatre has returned to the original convocation of ritual theatre, anthropocosmic theatre. In this circular action, it can be seen that the thousand masks worn by the theatre of our times aim merely to bring about the participation of the audience in the game of true-or-false which is theatre. For better or for worse, in the last thirty years western progressive, research and laboratory theatre has established the stage as the true body of dramatic action. In this quest, the job of author first became the job of director, and then a task of collective creation.

We are not here to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option, but to indicate that creative theatre in the western world took on new characteristics of space and time, or rather, another dramatic dimension. The vehicle of ideas and emotions of *zom teatrikon*, the theatrical animal, is no longer the voice, the gestures and the rhetoric of the actor: now it is the whole organicism of his body which expresses the crux of the dramatic conflict. We are talking about the sixties and the stage revolution brought about by

a Polish director called Jerzy Grotowski, with the idea of a theatre poor in material resources and rich in human tensions which would express, through the activation of all the actor's psychophysical apparatus, the tribulations of the human being.

When the discipline of Laboratory Theatre began to be regarded as the bible of a new theatrical church throughout the world, Jerzy Grotowski announced that as of 1970 he would do no more conventional theatre, so as to devote himself to researching the mechanisms of what he himself later termed Active Culture. From my point of view, the new relationship which the Grotowskian actor had with the theatre, had brought on the need for a new relationship between the actor and the audience. It was simply a case of doing away with the condition that the spectator was someone who merely watched the performers in action. He had to be made to perform, even if in order to achieve this no more theatre was performed. As far as I know, Grotowski discovered that theatre is an arena in which one can only work with actors, while the world is wider than that, and any of its creatures is an actor in his own life.

During their travels, Nicolás Núñez, Helena Guardia and other members of the *Taller de Investigación Teatral* at UNAM, had direct contact with the Laboratory Theatre and worked with Grotowski on various international projects. Previously, these theatre workers had decided to take Mexican identity as a starting point for their first performances. So it was that with the outstanding participation of Juan Allende in this searching process, the workshop staged Octavio Paz's *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*), and *Zapata*, a show which we will now call Grotowskian, in which the workshop dipped into the indigenous roots of the Caudillo del Sur.

With the Polish experience already in his rucksack, the *Taller* director arrived in Mexico to study in depth the philosophy of the ancient Mexicans, and found in this the anthropocosmic conception which gave both name and foundation to his subsequent research. The people working in the university workshop found in the Polish forests the psychophysical mechanisms

which allow the person who is exercising them to find a better harmony with the environment, with himself and, finally, with the Universe. If we say it like that, it could give the impression that we are commenting on a new *Hare Krishna*, or another form of cultural escapism. On the contrary, the anthropocosmic meaning of the TRW's work is based, as Nicolás will explain in a few moments, on the one hand on the vision of the world as seen in Nahuatlán philosophy, and on the other hand, on the latest scientific discoveries in this field.

The idea is that if, through controlled super-effort, we activate some of the untouched areas of our organism, we can achieve in time a new state of consciousness in which it is easier to reach the psychophysical balance which we often seek in the doctor's surgery or on the psychiatrist's couch. This is the form of the work; its content is described in the eagerness of the first settlers on this earth to have their own image, a whole heart. Nahuatlán philosophy allows us, in an allegorical way, to offer our hearts to the Sun, so that through our symbolic sacrifice the order of the Universe is not yet broken.

You may ask what this type of mental craftsmanship has to do with daily life. Well, the *Taller's* intention is to offer the public in general a space for participatory work, in which we are all actors in our own action, without the need to follow instructions, to accept dogmas, or have an experience which has been imposed. All this is possible because the field of work is the human body, and the body does not lie. Either it really flies over the work place, or it crashes and falls to the floor. Finding a place in which one simply flies is not bad going in this world of crashes, first of all because the workshop has outlived mistrust in its midst and a lack of understanding at institutional level. As is customary with us, this is work which has been called to question without being known and understood. I would even add that the reason was precisely because the work's meaning, intention and aims were not known. Nobody there wants to be an apostle of a new stage religion. The group's only aspiration is to offer actors in particular, and the general public, a method of participatory theatre which has demonstrated in a practical way

its helpfulness, after more than five years of continuous research and training.

For me, finally, anthropocosmic theatre is a work space in which for a few moments we come to be aware that man really is part of the universe.

A speech given by Nicolás Núñez on the night of 10th September 1984 at the Colegio de México, on the theme of Anthropocosmic Theatre

What is anthropocosmic theatre?

Where does it come from?

Where is it going?

We could reply that it is born in response to an urgency.

What urgency?

The urgency to be in the here and now in the fullest possible way.

If to get man onto the moon we need a great deal of knowledge and resources, to get our consciousness up to date in the here and now, no less is needed.

The system of work in our workshop is to investigate possibilities and mechanisms which will help us with this updating.

Rite is the oldest device used by humanity as a vehicle to achieve this updating. Throughout history, a whole range of possibilities and variants have stemmed from rite. Theatre is one of the direct heirs of the convocation of the here and now, only in general terms it has become a type of depository in disguise. What do I mean by a depository in disguise?

We are told that a very old form of knowledge was deposited in Tarot cards so that it could circulate through time without any danger, since in this way it could be passed on from generation to generation, from civilisation to civilisation, disguised as a game of chance. Hence theatre, as we know it, has served as a disguise for the ancestral convocation of the here and now. To remove theatre's disguise and recover its original strength is, for us, to investigate, design, poke tirelessly with tools of breathing, movement, participation and vibration which will allow us literally to set the place alight, so as to have our look and body open to the next man, where the

deep breathing of my individual self is united with the consciousness of my collective self, without fear, with the certainty that I only have to be and exist in the world, working, here and now, in good faith.

We believe that this attitude to start off with would be enough to help reorganise the chaos. That is why we think that the workshop's work can help rebuild our trust in our possibilities, that is, those of everybody; our possibilities to work on an image or a heart; our potential to realise, for example, that it is not by chance that we are here today.

Needless to say we went, as you may have realised, for the precepts of Nahuatlán philosophy, precepts which give our workshop its ethical base.

Our projects *Zapata*, *Aztlán* and *Tonatiuh* are designs for participatory theatre which have been generated over several years of research in various areas. These works are now beginning to find their path in the field of the teaching of theatre.

We could, therefore, affirm that anthropocosmic theatre generates designs for participatory theatre with the meaning of sharing an experience, and that this cultural alternative is currently proving its efficiency, not only in Mexico, but in various parts of the world. Hence space is won for the phenomenon of transculture, i.e. culture in transit, in motion, active, participatory.

Participatory theatre has earned its legitimacy very slowly within the field of theatre. At this moment it is beginning to be looked upon as something more than pure madness. This may be due on the one hand to the fact that scientists have started to look upon us favourably, and on the other to the fact that we have approached our work in a more scientific way.

Now, rather than drawing out a list of the influences and contributions which our work has received, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people and institutions who, having come into contact with the group's work, have supported and enriched it; in the same way, we would like to thank all of you here today for making the effort to come and be with us. I am sure that some of you have come out of curiosity, others in solidarity, others still due to your involvement. Whatever the case, I think that the fact that we

have gathered together to talk about anthropocosmic theatre can help people to understand that our work is to develop modest designs which drive us to recall natural rhythms; we could, for instance, be reminded that we have a full Moon at the moment. Thank you.

**A speech made by Ethel Krauze⁶² on the night of 15th December 1987
at the Casa del Libro Universitario, to mark the first edition of *Teatro
Antropocosmico***

Good evening. Perhaps I am the least suitable person to begin this launch of a book about theatre, since I have a lot more to do with work on writing than work on the stage. However, I am, perhaps, the most suitable to introduce this theatrical experience from the non-theatrical side of it, that is the part which deals with a normal, run-of-the-mill audience, a spectator, and then those who really understand this field should take over from me.

Nicolás Núñez invited me to present his book, (and I am deeply grateful to him for this), due, I think, to an article I wrote a short time ago in *Excelsior*, where I told of my experience watching one of his most recent performances, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, performed as participatory theatre. I went to watch and in this article I related what had happened to me. I did not know Nicolás Núñez; I was faintly aware of what he was doing, and my visit to see *The Tempest* was the first time I had been close to his work. There I went through what for me was a very new experience. From the second act I had to get up from my seat, from which I was watching the performance very comfortably; I had to be blindfolded; I had blindly to put my hands on the shoulders of the person opposite me - without knowing who this was - and I had to do what I was told. I had to go out suddenly into the cold night, out of the stage area, with no idea of where I was going. I felt I was going to fall on the stone steps, in the mud, in the bushes; I heard strange sounds, of drums, snail shells, birds and human voices, and had to enter into this experience. So I related this. I

62 Ethel Krauze: Cultural journalist for *Excelsior*.

said that it was an experience well worth going through. Nicolás Núñez told me something later which pleased me a great deal, that I had understood what this participatory theatre business meant, because I had had no previous, shall we say, theoretical experience of it. I had experienced it as a spectator and I had understood it. Hence this invitation to launch his book.

I said at the beginning that I had a lot more to do with writing than with the stage. I have, however, obliquely experienced something of the stage. I was once the co-author of a collective theatrical show. I have also been on stage, and have done various things in theatre, although my writing deals basically with other genres. In this first experience of mine in a collective show, which was called *De Mugir a Mujer* (*From Mooing to Being a Woman*), I had the chance to meet one of Nicolás Núñez's disciples, Jaime Soriano, who prepared the group of women with whom we performed this production in 1983, when we were at the Casa del Lago for a time. He gave us workshops on bodily expression and from then on, also for the first time in my life, I understood that we have a body as well as a head and that if we do not get it going, our head will be of very little use. There I learned to allow myself to drift through my senses, to dare to close my eyes, to understand that the strength of the senses is not in our sight, as the major mover of human communication, as has been claimed, but in other things: in our senses of smell and especially touch, and it is in our hearing and in the possibilities of the voice itself. This could appear to sound rather elementary or commonplace: 'Close your eyes and see what you feel'. Nevertheless, whoever has experienced it knows that it is a unique experience. So I had something of a memory of that experience in the bodily expression workshop with Jaime Soriano and, driven on by the need to get into these different orbits from the ones we are used to, I approached the phenomenon of participatory theatre, wrote about it and finally got hold of a text, a document in which all the bases are set out. This is the book which we are presenting today, *Teatro antropocósmico*.

There I discovered where it comes from, why, what it is looking for, in what way it is based on the most ancient traditions and, at the same time,

in what way it is renewing the concept of theatre; in what way it is very old as well as being extremely up to date, and how it can involve us all, because I think that is one of the great meanings of this theatre on which Nicolás Núñez and his group are working: the fact that everybody can be involved. It is not only for theatrical people, it is for everybody. If we really open theatre up and put it in a house, in the street, wherever there is a human being, that is where we can have theatre. That is what we discovered with the book which we are presenting today, so I preferred to write a short text which I would like to read out and share with you. So as not to go off at a tangent or go on too long, I noted down a few points which this book suggested to me and which I consider to be fundamental or essential and very synthetic:

Teatro antropocósmico is the result of more than ten years of experience in the *Taller de Investigación Teatral* at UNAM, founded by Nicolás Núñez in 1975. It is an original, Mexican, extremely up to date proposal, which seeks to renew the concept of theatre and which, at the same time, starts off from the most ancient traditions of three continents. This ability to unite traditional with modern, national with universal, artistic with social, is perhaps one of the most beneficial characteristics of the proposal, which does not come to a close but rather serves as a springboard for new explorations. In this sense, the *Taller's Teatro antropocósmico* proposal is not a particular school or trend whose aim amounts to no more than the field itself, nor is it a specific area of knowledge about the theatrical world; it is, above all, an attitude in which we find its zeal for renewal and its importance. I say attitude because *Teatro antropocósmico* wants to turn theatre into a vehicle of self knowledge, of both the body and the mind, 'so as to give back to the organism its ability to be the echo box of the cosmos', as is said in the text. That is to say, it is not the usual stage where action is performed and fiction is pretended before a number of spectators, but rather in a space where we are going to discover, with all our senses open, what we are and what we have around us. It is, therefore, participatory, and not merely informative or entertaining theatre.

How. Where this attitude springs from. What results have been achieved. How it is done in practice. These are the answers which the book offers us. We learn that the process has been long, winding and meticulous and that its sources are so varied that they range from the ancient East to the modern West via the pre-Hispanic world. The Workshop members recount their experiences in India, where they studied Tibetan theatre, and their discovery of dance and the voice as key elements of rite. They also describe their work in different parts of the Mexican Republic researching Nahuatl theatre so as to understand our roots in ceremonies, dances, and the use of all the voice's vibrations as a means of purification.

Then comes the western section: Stanislavski's here and now, Brechtian techniques, and the Workshop's experiences at the Old Vic theatre in England, at the Strasberg Institute in New York, with Grotowski in Mexico and Poland.

From each of these sources the *Taller*, or the gang, as Nicolás Núñez calls it, has taken theoretical coincidences and practical tools which form the infrastructure of the book *Teatro Antropocósmico*.

The author says:

The ways of learning theatre here in Mexico generally separate us from our specific reality, bring about a certain type of schizophrenia in us and divide us, because they oblige us to behave with attitudes, clothes and ways of viewing the world which do not correspond to our reality. We are not European, nor are we fair-haired. We are dark and we live in Mexico. How can we avoid the harm that these systems can do to us, and yet at the same time take advantage of them? I think this is possible. The harm lies in their way of disorienting us; the benefit is in their particular exercises.

These sentences offer a perfect definition of the attitude of assimilation and renewal which the Theatre Research Workshop keeps alive.

All of the members, as Mexican performers - that is how they refer to themselves, and deliberately not as actors - take on the commitment to develop a particular line of work which they define as the possibility of the performer-magician, somebody who takes a sacrificial path serving as a bridge between the sacred and the profane; a performer announced by Einstein, sought by Jung, visualised by Stanislavski, incarnated by Artaud, researched by Grotowski and known intuitively by the majority of people dedicated to theatre.

It is this type of performer who corresponds to our times and whom we should seek in our work.

To exemplify these quests, three schemes for participatory theatre which have been developed over the last few years are explained in the book: *Aztlán*, *Tonatiuh* and *Huracán* were performed in different parts of Chapultepec Forest. There are also accounts written by the participants themselves, in the form of poems, letters, and words which have been said on different occasions about these productions. In other words, it is a very vivid set of accounts, very much flesh and blood, as indeed are all those who belong to this group.

I will only add that *Teatro antropocósmico* is an adventure well worth facing up to against the paralysis of one's body, mind, will, sensitivity and imagination - a paralysis which is imposed on us by today's ways of life. Thank you very much.

A speech made by Fernando de Ita on the night of 15th December 1987 at the Casa del Libro Universitario, to mark the first edition of *Teatro antropocósmico*

I understand that theatre is fundamentally about one man meeting another. I think that in the work of almost fifteen years undertaken by the Theatre Research Workshop at UNAM founded by Nicolás Núñez, what is worthy of particular emphasis is their quest and their way of conducting this meeting. We now know that in all cultures, dramatic performance is born from propitiatory rite in which the community finds itself among the forces of nature, with the invisible forces which have dominated this rite from the very

beginning. Theatre is born from rite and then it flees from it as one would flee from a plague.

One of the problems faced by this type of research at the beginning of the seventies, was somehow linked to the horror felt by left-wing thought with regard to any type of artistic expression involving religion.

Midway through this century, the proletarian parties (following, I really feel, the Marxist exegesis that religion is the opium of nations), denied without any previous research any connection between art, myth, rite and religion. Curiously, only recently Heberto Castillo, the presidential candidate for the Mexican Socialist Party, swore that he would defend the right to religion and what is sacred to a people whose very culture depends on this sense of the religious and the sacred.

I turn to the launch of the book in this way because when we first began, a few years ago, to present the work of Nicolás and the *Taller*, certain critic colleagues who wear blinkers when they judge things accused us of being reactionaries for supporting a project which attempts to eliminate the petit bourgeois idea of 19th Century theatre, theatre whose only use is to entertain, on a particular stage. Since the beginning of this research which has followed its winding course - as Ethel correctly said - the idea was how I should meet the next man; how I should establish this relationship in a myth, in contemporary rite.

My role in the *Taller* has been somehow to represent the sceptical, earthly side of things - if I may use the expression - in the sense of linking this quest to the reality of our country and our times.

The *Taller*, as is also stated in the book, and the very research into the concept of anthropocosmic theatre, which could suddenly sound like a puff of opium or a mirage of the mind, actually stems from two very important, extremely verifiable pieces of wisdom. One of them is the use of philosophy, cosmogony, the conception of Central American peoples, of the first settlers on this earth, and the other is the contemporary sense of dramatic action and scientific research. As Ethel also pointed out, these two sources with one foot

in the past and the other in the future suddenly produce something which cannot yet be seen and above all cannot yet be understood.

I would like to mention particularly the *Taller's* underground, obscure, vilified work in terms of the extent to which researchers, critics and theatre people have more or less set about condemning something which they do not know and understand, instead of criticising something with which they do not agree. This is important because it is a beautiful thing to see a group of people who have given their all with passion, delirium and madness, to a project which receives no subsidy - because the fact that the group is involved with the University does not mean that it is subsidised. On the contrary, one of the certainties of this love of one's work is given to us by the fact that the majority of people who work here do so because they are happy to be involved in research, not to receive an emolument for their work. The media, I repeat, have omitted to talk about a *Taller* which for more than a decade has been researching into what could be the rite of our times.

I think that after a very materialistic moment in our society, many groups from many parts of the world, with many different attitudes, are suddenly going to finish the millennium seeking to recapture the original sources of thought and action. Beyond any millennialism there may be in this, what Nicolás and the *Taller's* work brings to the fore is this need - to use Nicolás's own words - to look into each other's eyes and find in the other person what we have lost, which is from the deep identity of the human being to the, also deep, meaning of life.

I believe that what the work aims to do in its essence is to rediscover the will to be on earth, here and now, and it is a task which we should embrace with pleasure, because it is based on the premises of the pre-Hispanic world, which valued life on learning that its destiny was mortal. In a world of death I really think it is worthwhile believing in a rediscovery of the essences of what we are, what we were and what we will be.

The *Taller*, as is also stated in the book and as Ethel has mentioned too, has a whole range of influences. One of the first reasons for criticism has

been the thinking that as it is close to ritual and striving for sacred meaning in life, it is therefore something esoteric, something anthropocosmic and out of place, and no effort has been given to indepth research into what this anthropocosmic proposal is. Why is man, with his body, the echo box of the universe? This sentence, which appears futuristic or hollow, suddenly takes on a deep meaning when we attend the *Taller's* projects. It must be made clear that this is work which for many years has been devoted to a daily, constant praxis. It is not merely a theory worked on in a void but, basically, work carried out in reality. I think it is here that the critics with no deep knowledge of the work have lost the very meaning of the research.

As they criticise the work because of the sources which the members of the *Taller* pursue, due to their closeness to Grotowski, their ritual meaning - this I would stress - and their refusal to approach daily work, work which people do every day in an extremely disciplined way, they have lost sight of the fact that a research proposal is not only being carried out in theory, in a void, but above all in practice; people are seeking to find through daily practice this proposition that the actor's, or man's, body is seriously an echo box in which a great deal of things explode, from the past to the present and future of man.

I would very much like to invite you to read this book because I believe it summarises a type of research which it is worthwhile to follow in Mexico, a type of theatre which, moreover, does not deny other theatrical trends.

In his presentation of the book, Nicolás says that there are as many theatres as there are performers in the world, and accepts a plurality which he himself has been denied since the time when his research - and I repeat, this is what I would like to emphasise - was dodged, criticised and not properly understood. This is what often happens to us here in this beautiful country of cannibals in which we eat the next person without really knowing who they are, why they exist and what they want. What the *Taller* aims to do - with certain deficiencies, with certain u-turns on the road, with a few revisions which must always happen in this type of research - is simply to

find this fundament which man, primitive man, once had, of what was the reason for this rite, this reverence for nature, for rhythmic meanings in life, for natural meanings. Now that we have lost it in a dramatic way, as moreover we really cannot make any more jokes about birds dying in the air, now that the authorities are finally seeing that our world is changing in a dramatic way, that the men and women of this country really are in serious danger of losing their lives, simply due to the atmosphere which we breathe in this city, for example, I sincerely think it worthwhile to read a book which leads us to rediscover fundamental essences of what man is, without aspiring to deal with redemption or religion - in the sense of propaganda - but simply as an act of life which analyses itself so as to propose an action which can really be for the good of the person who does it and the one who sees it.

Finally, I would just like to note that if theatre has always been participatory, if it was born from a communal participation and is performed in this way - although it may have lost this at certain points in history - the interesting thing here is how this contemporary rite is being proposed, how it is proposing to us this breathing of one person with the next, and how research into theatre is being done in reality. There you will see, without much propaganda, that the *Taller* has done a lot of work over a long period of time and I would recommend that you go along, because this research is palpable and can be felt with practice. It is very difficult to talk about this research in merely theoretical terms because the important thing, the secret factor, always happens within the individual and is not transferrable. The best way to read *Teatro antropocósmico* is to experience the *Taller's* work, as they are open to the public at certain times, and this is when something can happen such as what happened to Ethel, who suddenly found a different way of being at the theatre, a way of being there and participating not only as a mere spectator in her seat but as an actor in a theatrical happening which gives each individual their own experience.

This invitation implies, therefore, that after reading the book you should spread the idea that it is worth following a participatory theatre in Mexico,

because I would repeat that precisely because it is Nicolás, and because he has done it in Mexico, this seems to take the shine off the matter. When other propositions suddenly arrive from Denmark, Poland etc, where they are doing the same thing and, in some cases, not with such a good intention nor with such good results, then we really are surprised and we ignore what we are doing here.

I think that people here, certainly in some way, are close to the *Taller* and believe in their work. But the invitation, I repeat, is for you to help this type of artistic manifestation to have a wider meaning, a more concrete diffusion and, above all, a more precise understanding, because we are talking about fifteen years of research and it still feels as if we were in the catacombs. Each of the *Taller's* projects still requires almost heroic acts to go ahead. From here, I would like to acknowledge the people who have worked for so many years for love of this sense of participation. From here, I offer my acknowledgement to the perseverance of the whole gang with whom I have had some good arguments, with whom I will continue to fight so that this proposition of meeting the next person and looking into each other's eyes may be truer by the day. Many thanks.

A speech made by Héctor Azar⁶³ on the night of 15th December 1987 at the Casa del Libro Universitario, to mark the first edition of *Teatro antropocósmico*

Nor do I consider myself the most authorised, the most suitable person to talk about this experience, but I do feel I am the most obliged, as a basic commitment to Nicolás.

This obligation has arisen since I bumped into him - for that is the best expression - at a particular moment twenty-five years ago when we did not meet, but rather bumped into each other, quite literally.

We were to see each other again two years later. We were to meet on the stage of the Foro Isabelino - may it rest in peace - through a basic play, because

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it was a play about breaking up, or break-ups, in the plural: Ionesco's *Jeux de Massacre* [*The Killing Game*], in which he was playing various roles together with our dear, unforgettable Espacio 15 Theatre Group, from UNAM. That is where I really saw and verified, or proved to be true, a series of things which I knew by intuition about Nicolás and which suggested to me that any type of relationship, any type of quest undertaken by Nicolás was, in a certain way, tinged with blood-red plasma, that Londonesque, Draculean type which he tried to propose in his first - not very successful, incidentally - book of short stories: that all his quests were going to poke into the most visceral side of the human being.

I am not surprised by the name of his proposition. He wanted, and still wants, to understand, to stretch out his hand and reach the depths of the essential from his skin inwards and the farthest planet from his skin outwards.

My relationship with him has always had this shade of viscosity. I am not therefore surprised that when he began his specifically theatrical quest, when he decided to take on the quality of a theatre animal, he should have gone specifically to the sources, to where theatre is a human experience, to what Ethel and Fernando have referred to as meeting and rediscovering. Meeting and rediscovering whom? Other people. Professor Paz has said that all of us are these other people - what theatre has as an essential element. I am not therefore surprised that Nicolás should go to the sources and hit upon the fact that religion and theatre rock in the same cradle in all civilisations. For it is precisely in theatre where the human being has his only chance to re-bind his interests, be they existential, metaphysical, biological, sentimental or sexual. The only chance the human has, the human being of spectacle, is to provoke images which re-bind men in their interests of these types.

Nicolás's quest from his skin inwards is the quest for many images which had brought on the anguish which belonged only to him and which he was trying eagerly to find outside him. That is why at a particular time he goes to situations, places and times so remote as for example Tibet, where he will have had his problems. Coming from an upper-middle-class family, hidden

away in mysticisms of the fifth to the tenth order, as we Mexicans would describe it, he goes to the source to drink from the mysticism of the first order. I am not sure if this mysticism can be drunk on a level higher than that of Octavio Paz.

The problems which Núñez surely had when he hit upon all this Tlaxcaltec baggage, all this Chimalpan baggage - and here we pay homage to Tlaxcala and Chimalpa, aside from the fact that it is an unsurpassable painting by José Mariía Velasco - the problems he had, with all his baggage, to get to a source of mysticism, the rising of a troubled sky, re-binding, primary, like Hinduism or Buddhism. Living through these experiences to the full, as he himself indicated at the very beginning, that is how they should be experienced. The scarcely modulated frequency of his vibrations obliges him to get into some really frantic situations in this quest.

After that I have no option other than to go to the spring which nourishes his national condition.

The dialectical process, so to speak, of thesis and antithesis - for that is what they could be: the pre-Hispanic source as a thesis inherent to his national condition, the orientalist antithesis as a presence of the universal - had to take him to convulsions which mean a particular commitment.

I do not know up to what point - Fernando said that it is full of influences and how good that is - but once somebody said to somebody else who was starting to write: that reminds me a lot of García Lorca. The latter somebody replied: of how many people does García Lorca remind us? When you read you should not try to decide what the influence is, but at a particular moment, to what point, in an eclectic, wise manner you can collect the influxes and dodge the rest either elegantly or inelegantly. I do not know the extent of the influences, particularly Artaudian as taught by Grotowski, and to what extent Nicolás affirms the closeness of Artaud himself and his theatre of cruelty with the human sacrifices of the pre-Hispanic world. Artaud was undoubtedly looking from the window of his madness and the pre-Hispanic world functioned from the re-binding need of better emotions and better gratifications to the end.

I find this book fulfilling because it talks a lot about things which Nicolás finds fascinating, because it speaks a great deal about things and to people whom Nicolás and I find fascinating, like Oscar Zorrilla, for instance, our beloved friend who is not absent because we think of him often.

The projects which Nicolás undertook with Oscar ought to be more abundant. That is the real position, as pointed out by those who spoke before me, about having one foot in Mexico and the other in the world. Not only Mexico in the twentieth century, how sad that would be. The foot in Mexico covers 500 years where, through theatre, Europe came to instil into the inhabitants of these regions a way of being and existing which was based on miracle. It was that medieval theatre which was really brought by the conquest, the true conquest of Mexico because it was the conquest of the spirit. It was not the violence of the conquest of Cortés and his captain, which was the same from the bars of Puerto de Palos to the bars of Caádiz, that operated in the conquest of Mexico. It was religious, medieval theatre, through instituted miracles which substituted the religion of the defeated, which means that these people live by a miracle, this theatre of miracles, and live every day through such a miracle. For me, one logical consequence of this proposition of Nicolás's, his gang, his colleagues, is finding the real link between the aspirations of those pre-Hispanic theatrical schemes tinged, transformed, suppressed, conformed by medieval theatre, and coming to deal with findings which, on the one hand, of course, bring up the thing which so worries the current-day Mexican state, national identity, but above all, they bring up conclusions which, derived from the Theatre of Sources, come to speak to us in a clearer way. Theatrically, this is a way of existing and being which characterises our Mexican of today.

The book *Teatro antropocósmico* is a proposition - as I understand it - and a commitment. The way of sealing it is to say this is the sociological, anthropological consequence which can help us to understand this miraculous way of living supported only by miracle, the miracle of life, the miracle of

death which characterises our national condition not only from the borders inwards but also in terms of our borders with the rest of the world.

Mexico is a magical country, as is said continually, but I am sure that people say this because the magic cannot be explained and because there are a lot of things which are not explained to us by those who govern us, nor by those who drive us, nor indeed can artists explain them. Magic cannot be based on that.

I feel that Nicolás' proposition is important for that reason, because it relates for us situations from the past which go beyond the estimations of the venerable Father Garibay and the no less venerable Miguel León Portilla, Horcasitas, and so many people who have told us a thousand times that the pre-Hispanic theatre schemes cannot be analysed according to European criticism, and we should delve into the sources. If we go to the sources of other countries, of other, more closed mysticisms - excuse the pleonasm - of other, more impenetrable mysticisms which are of use to us, it is to try and help others in this encounter about which we are all talking. We talk about this because the book beats with this between the lines, in the lines themselves, continually. It is the desire of the author to meet us specifically through something which means theatre, which, due to its audiovisual condition, knows perfectly well that something can be understood more and better if it is both seen and heard than if it is just either seen or heard.

I offer my warmest regards to Nicolás, as I always have done, and wish him every success for his book.