

Ana Correa

Yuyachkani, a Group Experience

I belong to a theatre group about to turn twenty-nine years old. This age has made us reflect upon the principles of our work, disclosing and sharing them, even with the spectators. They have been years of vocation, mystique and compromise, self-learning and creative independence, together with lots of work and sacrifice.

Some answers to the necessities of our practice - like the one of turning all kinds of areas into theatrical spaces - have been given to us this way. We presented performances in school-yards, at the entrance of a church, on a shantytown's only paved street, in a village square or in a peasant community. Since we didn't have a covered room provided with lights, stage and seating, we had to equip ourselves with a technique that would permit us to amplify our scenic presence with forms and contents which set up a dialogue with the spectators, sharpening and capturing their attention.

The awareness that comes from the time spent making theatre in Peru has opened up important routes for us to recognise our national and Latin American identity, recovering ancestral ways of understanding and making theatre which are apt for this continent and these times.

From this point of view, technique is a way of learning everything that is necessary to make theatrical communication effective, especially with the great audience, our people. The unusual spaces forced us to work upon other potentialities of our body and voice. In a similar way, traditional festivities, dances and celebrations gave us alternative notions of theatricality. Reality established a need for us to become manifold actors and actresses trained in various body disciplines, circus techniques, folklore dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, etc.

WOMEN FROM TWO GENERATIONS

I have often wondered if I needed all of this to become an actress and I discovered that I did. Together with the women of the group, my colleagues Rebeca and Teresa Ralli and Debora Correa, I also found that we could create a

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Yuyachkani in *La primera cena*. Photo: Arias y Aragón

space for ourselves by starting from our own specific creativity. We launched ourselves into new subjects and made ourselves the source of our research, working with our own issues, dreams and fantasies.

The creative process was enriching but arduous, with extremely long breaks when other group projects and tours overlapped. In the middle of the work process, Debora asked for a license from the group and moved to Cusco where she began a new personal life project. This was a very hard moment for the whole collective and especially for us women. We decided to continue the work and find a new companion, but we could not think of a replacement since all of the actor's material produced up to that point was very personal. Then we thought of inviting a young actress: this would be very interesting since we would be able to speak

of two different generations of women.

It wasn't easy to find her. Young actresses and actors in Peru today do not get together in collective forms of work. They prefer to work in specific productions for a determined length of time, summoned by a producer or a director. In the meantime they attend theatre and modern dance workshops. They have a tendency to be "workshoppers", to accumulate techniques, to take a bit from every option without going into any one in depth. They have no interest in talking about their craft, to reflect upon their own problems, nor to question themselves.

At this point I should also mention the interior violence Peru lived through during the past fifteen years, which traversed the lives of our young generation, made up of boys and girls who were between three and four-

teen years old when the war started. They experienced the violence with its fears and lack of a promise of a future in a completely different way from us. Perhaps their dreams consisted only in living or not living.

Finally we found Lucia Lora, who four years before had participated in the Second Intensive Session of our School Project. With her we were able to demonstrate to each other that, in spite of our differences and the specific ways in which we come in touch with our inner selves, we had many things in common and much to talk about as women.

We had a wonderful communicative and creative link with Lucia and in 1996 we presented *La Primera Cena* (The First Supper) for the first time. In this play, three women who shared their childhood and youth promised, before drifting apart, to meet on the last day of 1999 to welcome the new century while cooking together. Consuelo is a housewife and mother of five children; Ester, after being a political activist for many years, is now a painter; and the third woman does not show up, but her daughter Nadia (Lucia), a twenty year old woman without a defined profession, comes to the appointment instead.

Throughout the play they cook a *sancochado*, a traditional Peruvian dish, while they get to know each other again after so many years and also discover the younger woman. As the play evolves, a series of relationships are woven between them disclosing their secret conflicts. Nadia, who doesn't seem to believe in anything and apparently is only aspiring to her own personal success, reveals the scars that war has left on her memory and shows her true frailty and deep need to believe in the others.

TO TEACH AND LEARN

The relationship between teaching and learning has been another constant in Yuyachkani's work. We continue to learn

by sharing the tools that have been useful in our work with young apprentices invited to our intensive sessions and/or workshops. There, we introduce them to a pedagogical proposal that is a product of our own concrete experience, by making accessible to them different practices and, above all, an attitude towards research and self-awareness. We try to orient them towards a self-forming discipline that will allow them to discover their own technical and sensorial system in a personal way.

With this intent of sharing and learning by teaching in mind, in 1995 we created the Centre for Scenic Experimentation (CEXES), an artistic space for theatre research where young people from different schools can integrate in an interdisciplinary meeting of various art forms in search of new scenic languages.

One of the first indoor shows created in CEXES was *Sarita Concierto Teatro* which centred on young people's faith. We approached the theme as a scenic action, placing ourselves at the limit of stage genres, in search of different fragmented material that a young spectator could organise.

I had my first experience as assistant director in this performance directed by Miguel Rubio. We deepened our line of investigation about the city, showing everyday-life, human relations, anxieties, loneliness, dreams and non-dreams of its young inhabitants. We were very interested in encouraging participants in the project to look at the history they had to live through in order for them to be able to take into account the elements of this experience in their own pursuits and paths.

I remember the girls' characters: a young prostitute; a pregnant teenage *tamale* seller; a young fortune teller; a child who pretended to be Sarita Colonia, a popular saint who has not been consecrated by the Catholic

Church; and a girl in school uniform who sold gum, cigarettes and candy. This last character was created by Rocio Antero Cabrera and at a certain point in the play she sang a song called *Calla la boca* (Shut your mouth) where she told of sexual harassment by an old drunkard in her neighbourhood.

Precisely this girl, and the wish to create a new open-space show for teenagers, allowed us to start working on a new creation with young people, treating sexual violence against women more specifically.

"ANDAMIOS" AND THE ARCHITRAVE OF A NEW LIFE

Andamios (Scaffoldings) is the last show I directed for CEXES produced together with a group of restless women lawyers from DEMUS (Study for the Defence of Women's Rights). This show was born out of the need to promote the right to peace and a life free of violence, calling special attention to the problem of sexual violence against children and teenage girls.

Most mothers in Peru, at some time between the ages of twelve and sixteen, have been raped, often by their father, stepfather, relative, neighbour or close friend. It is estimated that six women are raped every hour in our country. These acts of violence against women are almost never reported to the police. We are not talking about a one-off rape but about rapes that take place over the years and are kept secret due to shame and fear. The silence comes from thinking that the damage is irreparable and because of the indifference of the authorities that often allows the offender to go free.

Micaela, the young schoolgirl of *Sarita Concierto Teatro*, is now a young woman. She tells her girlfriends that she has been raped at a construction site and they decide to dress up as workers and join the enter-

prise to find the rapist. They are found out and during the confrontation Micaela is brought in to point out the culprit. Under pressure, she admits that it was none of them and that, due to fear and shame, she had not been able to tell them that the rapist came from her family. The young men and women become friends and share their life experiences. They look into what it means to build new ties, new relationships and new young human beings - men and women who value unity and solidarity. The building is finally finished. Micaela begins to reconstruct her life and she makes a parallel between the house and the body: "My body is like my home, no-one has the right to enter unless I want them to..."

Andamios arrives in schools with thirteen actors and actresses, five musicians and technicians, besides scaffolding, metal cylinders, tin cans and construction workers' helmets. The performance is presented with the belligerence of rock, the irreverence and strength of youth, and a wish for justice and solidarity for all the young women who share Micaela's shame and fear while watching the play. After the song *Calla la boca* now comes forth *Ya no me callo* (I won't shut up anymore).

Over 50,000 students all over Peru have seen the play up to now. Sociologist Gonzalo Portocarrero has summarised three approaches to gender from the opinions of the young spectators: machismo, patriarchy and equity, where men and women are worth the same and thus have the same rights and opportunities.

Young female spectators feel empowered by this last point of view, they are encouraged to denounce and criticise male domination and to open up to the optimistic perspective of growth and a leading role in life.

BEGINNERS WITH EXPERIENCE

When Yuyachkani turned twenty-five, we asked ourselves if we wanted to continue working together, and we answered yes and that from then on we would consider ourselves as "beginners with experience". We continue to confront the young actors and actresses we work with at CEXES with this attitude and vocation, passing on our experience and learning from their points of view.

On a personal level, I have learned from our creative encounters with Lucia and Rocio, that we have to create new bridges for communication and dialogue, for reflection and action. We must reinvent our

knowledge and all that we deem necessary, for this meeting between creative women to bear forth its fruit.

Translated from Spanish by Addie Barandiaran.

ANA CORREA (Peru) is an actress in Yuyachkani, a theatre group based in Lima. From 1978 she has participated in the creation of eighteen productions. In 1990 she became Master and Representative of the Shaolin Sh'uan Fa System and teaches Tai Chi, Weapons and Folklore. She directs a children's theatre festival and a research project for children theatre productions.



Ana Correa, in the work demonstration *Una actriz se prepara*.
Photo: Arias y Aragón