

OPEN LETTERS

Lugano, 30th of June 2004

Dear Julia,

I have not forgotten, on the contrary! As I usually do, I carried with me this possibility of challenging my difficulties and reticence to confront the written word for a long time, but I have not succeeded in finding a verbal form that communicates my experience, my thoughts, my many doubts: the beauty of "milestones".

Perhaps it is too intimate a theme for me and I am not able to distance myself from it, seeing my experience from the outside, or perhaps I simply do not know how to write.

I find myself more and more wishing not to leave traces behind me, pursuing a silent space and time that contrasts strongly with all the noisy movements of everyday life.

I wanted to thank you anyway for having offered me this opportunity. I look forward to reading with immense pleasure the signs and the signals offered by all the Magdalenas who don't fear writing and who are more generous than I am in donating a wing beat of beauty from their pathways.

I hug you affectionately,

Bruna

(BRUNA GUSBERTI, Teatro delle Radici, Switzerland)

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Medellín, 28th of March 2003

Dear Magdalenas,

I would like to share some experiences and thoughts on what it has meant for us to embark on the unforeseeable journey of the Magdalena Project. In 1994, Jill Greenhalgh invited us to participate in the International Festival of Women in Contemporary Theatre in Cardiff. We were welcomed in an atmosphere of friendship and trust. The quality of the Festival was high; we were not afraid of criticism, even less of being excluded; there was no competition, we only breathed a common complicity and commitment in order to donate everything we had as sisters and artists of the theatre of the world.

We came in the style of our performance Emocionales: impulsive and dazzled as if seeing everything for the first time. We presented three productions as we wanted to offer as much as possible. It was very important for us to escape our isolation as a Colombian women's theatre group; we needed to meet other practitioners to talk about the craft, of the creative processes, of production and also - why not - of our limitations.

We soon perceived that this was the only possible ship to board in order to save ourselves as a "species". It was the ship of feasible utopias, of changing itineraries, of commitment to ourselves, our art, the planet, humanity and women. The ship of the Magdalena Project network backed our convictions and purpose of transforming the course of women theatre artists in a country like Colombia that firmly resists change.

We have fought against wind and tides to reach the festivals and meetings that the network organises. And fortunately we have been able to attend some, where we have shared our work and our hearts, enjoying our adventure. We were reckless enough to invite Magdalena Pacifica to our shores, without knowing how we would convince a nation that is caught up in a fratricidal war, of its importance; how we would motivate and illuminate a dream of women who do not have any economic prestige.

Six months have passed since Magdalena Pacifica, and we continue to be

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silent, annihilated and surprised by the magnitude, power and vitality of the Festival that spilled over all our expectations. We still cannot believe that we achieved this impossible event in our country governed by the Holy Spirit and Our Father. The Magdalena Pacifica journey was a true challenge to the dominant official position; we presented what is not allowed: a revolutionary theatre art of women from all over the world, that questions our present with new and different images, themes and aesthetic concerns, so that even naive spectators can be moved by truths other than sex, cajolement and football.

We presented the words of women, with their own understanding of peace, culture and economy, promoting the audience's reflection on our national life. All the performances that passed in front of our eyes were truly wonderful; they left an indelible trace in our environment, removing the bandages and opening unknown windows for women and creative artists; they stimulated the interest of many people, and actively included the women's political and social movement that recognised a theatre discourse with the power of provoking change. If we felt that the festival went beyond us and spilled over, it was in the positive sense of invading the reality of our historical context. Magdalena Pacifica was an event of total confrontation with the patriarchal, conservative and war-bent ways of our Colombian culture.

This Festival is the proof that we women can produce miracles with the certainty of being able to move the unmovable. We achieved the Festival thanks to the network, trust and courage of the Magdalena Project that accepted the risks, difficulties, precariousness and dysfunctions of the unforeseeable and chaotic life of our Macondo, of our life in a hundred years of silence.

Magdalena Pacifica boosted our confidence as women artists and allowed us to confront our precariousness, interrogate our limits, cry-out our frustrations, and recognise that we didn't give ourselves enough time. However, even mistakes have their beauty if they are instructive and become a guide for future experiences - and here I want to personally thank Geddy Aniksdal.

Perhaps we are not the ones who have most profited from all that

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the network offers with its workshops, group and directors' meetings, artistic and pedagogic exchanges - and don't think we don't regret it!

However the festivals in which we have participated have encouraged us in all senses; most of all they helped us understand that we are in movement and that this capacity to move makes each festival a journey with a new and unknown itinerary, marked by its differences and particularities, at which one cannot arrive with the arrogant spirit of conquest, of the unity of a trademark or a universal patent. It is not possible to submit to the homogenisation of our experiences, to a single aesthetic or ideological concept.

Arriving in a foreign country we have to see with new eyes what we don't know and have sufficient humility to recognise that it is not a question of superior or inferior cultures, so as to live each experience as rich and unique. We have gone on board freely in order to discover the "other" in each shore we will reach. To discover the best amid deficiency is a way of taking advantage of the infinite possibilities of creation and it will give us other ways of being, seeing and accepting ourselves to turn life and the world into the true paradise that it is or could be.

We are very happy to have been able to go to the Magdalena Australia Festival to share another journey with the Magdalena Project. However we are sad and distressed by the supremacy of war in the world, by the publicised bombings of the West on the city of A Thousand and One Nights. We are sad because likewise escalates the politics of confrontation and armed intervention in Colombia.

Pilar Restrepo Mejia

(PILAR RESTREPO MEJIA, Teatro La Máscara, Colombia)

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Lima, 7th January 2004

Dear Julia,

Every now and then I discover that in some part of the world another Magdalena is going to happen. Then I stop, everything stops, and in my mind images start to pass by. All your faces and feelings pass by; the lived moments, the discoveries, the reaffirmations, all those things that are so difficult to express in words and that live in me because I have experienced them each time I have met all of you.

Magdalena is my "milestone" that appears now and then and leaves a new trace in me. The next sign, the next stop, will be in Peru.

A hug and kiss, lots of love and break a leg in Cuba,

Teresa

(TERESA RALLI, Yuyachkani, Peru)

Street performance, Yuyachkani, 1993. Photo: Fiora Bemporad