

Post from Brazil

From: Cibele Forjaz



São Paulo, 30th of March 2008

Dear Julia,

One ordinary day in 2007 I was at home in São Paulo when I got a phone call from Leo Sykes, director of Circo Teatro Udi Grudi, a brilliant group of clowns who divide themselves between Brasília and the world and whom I met in 2005 at the Festival de Teatro of Recife. Despite having only a brief encounter, we identified with each other immediately: women, theatre directors, group animators, producers of our own work, and to top it all, mothers - in other words, what we can call women of theatre, warriors, like all of us. Probably because of this, or because the Cia. Livre (Free Company) has a long history as a research group in Brazil and because we use non-conventional spaces, reinvent texts and, at that time, worked with improvised performance, Leo was ringing to invite me to come to the first Meeting of Directors in Brasília. I was to be part of a round table of theatre directors with Hugo Rodas, Renato Ferracini and Eugenio Barba. I accepted the invitation immediately, but, given the glow of the other participants, I asked myself: "Why me?"

After the experience, I realise why I went to Brasília: it was necessary for me (and by extension, for my work) to get to know Odin's passion for theatre, and to see you, Julia, on stage.

I saw two work demonstrations: *The Dead Brother* and *The Flying Carpet*. During the time of the Action - that is of the demonstration - it was as though I and the rest of the audience were travelling with you on a flying carpet, crossing not space, but the expanded space of the creative act, the rawness and, at the same time, polish of presence, the strength and weakness of being human. When the session was over, back in the theatre, I felt thankful. Your simple work demonstration reminded me that the soul of our art resides in the actor's live presence. That all the juggling we use in putting perfor-

mances on stage only makes sense if put at the service of the human being; that it is a human art for humans.

All of us who dedicate our lives to theatre know that we swim against the current of the entertainment industry, of success, money and the other temporary illusions that contemporary societies and their means of mass communication prefer to indulge in. Our work, on the contrary, is the work of ants. It demands that each of us has a strong, even ferocious, intention. But sometimes, halfway along our path, undermined by the difficulties of production, we feel emptied of the deep meaning of our art and, like actors without subtext or intention, we lose track of ourselves.

Our craft is primarily a profession of faith: stage faith, but nevertheless faith. Your faith warmed my faith. It linked me again to the subtext of my work. I remembered why I spent a year researching the rituals, myths and songs for the dead of the Amerindian tribes¹, trying to understand the meaning of death, and through it, each tribe's notion of life. There are complex concepts for us such as the polyphony of the human person, anthropophagy, warrior cannibalism, funeral cannibalism, the "death-path", "celestial cannibalism" and the "heavens of skin changing".

After 'eating' (in the cultural, *anthropophagic*² sense of the word) all that we had read, researched and recreated through our eyes, heads and stomachs and the actors' bodies, it took more than six months of improvisations and scenarios in partnership with a dramaturg to write a text-proposal. Then followed a dramatic translation of *The Path of the Dead* for a performance in five stages, the re-reading of the idea of the 'double' through theatrical language, the attempt to create an epic-ritualistic interpretative language, to create a performance where the audience that intersects with the story is in reality the main actor.

Today *Vem Vai - The Path of the Dead* is ready. "Vem Vai" is a game of words with two words in Portuguese (*vem* and *vai*) meaning coming and going and in Marubo (*Vëi* and *vai*) meaning death and way. We managed to make it through all the difficulties of the concepts and translation that the work imposed on us. We had a four month season in the Avenida Paulista SESC³, in the financial centre of the country. We had what is typically called a "success with the critics and the audience" and we even won prizes. However, after the opening we could not get money or support to take the work to poorer suburbs, to other towns, to the interior of the country. There is no interest in this. We

1. We concentrated on the culture of some tribes like the Marubo, Araweté, Kaxinawá, Kalapalo, Wayãpi, Jívaro, Amuesha, Yekuana and Wari. In Brazil there are more than 250 different peoples with different cultures and speaking more than 180 different languages. In our formal education we do not study anything about their existence and multiple cultures, nor about the great influence of the indigenous people on our culture and way of being, about the history of the massacre that was our colonisation and how we are accomplices in the continuation of this massacre, at the very least because of our ignorance.

2. Anthropophagus in English is a rare word for cannibal. There is a well known cultural movement in Brazil initiated by Oswald de Andrade with his manifesto on anthropophagy. For Andrade a cannibal is a person who feeds on human meat to satiate his hunger while an anthropophagus eats only special parts (i.e. the heart or the brain) of an enemy's body to absorb his virtues and courage: Andrade referred to the Tupinambá, a tribe that lived on the coast of Brazil, being anthropophagus and not cannibal. He maintained that Brazilian artists could feed on chosen parts of distant and different cultures to strengthen their own original nature.

3. Business Social Service, a social and cultural institution that has an important role for artistic research in Brazil.

had no way of continuing the work and taking it to the people who really interest us. Brazil does not know Brazil, doesn't care about Brazil. At that moment I questioned all the work I had done and I felt a huge emptiness.

That was when the phone rang and Leo invited me to Brasília. I spent three days with the delicious Udi Grudi troupe, with Eugenio and with you, hearing stories about theatre the world over, of the director in Sarajevo, of journeys to many places and different people who are connected through theatre. When I saw you on stage, all this information was personified in the body of the actress, in the act of being on stage, in the naked presence of people face to face. These are the moments that make the life lived in the flesh worth living.

It is there, in the emptiness, that a blessing is necessary: to understand the rubbish and the luxury (*lixo* and *luxo* in Portuguese) of our lives, the daily happiness of work, the gift of our dedication, the profound intention of our daily work in order to face the thousand rejections that pull us down. And to keep going: the deep meaning and absurdity of our faith. I returned to São Paulo, full of strength to fight, as we do everyday "for our whole life". When you wrote me an email from Denmark and asked me to write a text, I wanted to give a piece of myself, an important thought, something worth publishing. But I was unable. Mostly because of the hurricane of other tasks: a journey to Cariri, a season in Rio de Janeiro, the first book of the Cia. Livre, teaching (in the meantime I have become a lecturer in the Theatre Department at the University of São Paulo), a Master's degree, rehearsals, super-

visions, traffic and trances. I did not manage. But you insisted and I, at the last minute, decided to send you this letter: a thank you letter.

In the eye of the storm we need to keep in touch, to remember that somewhere in Denmark or in Brazil there are friends, sisters living their lives; to form a web of protection, even if telepathic.

From your Brazilian ant friend,
Cibele Forjaz

PS. With this letter I send you our first book, about the process of creation of *Vem Vai - The Path of the Dead*. One day I will come and visit you in the flesh, in distant cold Denmark, land of Hamlet.

The photograph of Cibele Forjaz
on page 104 is by Setton

CIBELE FORJAZ (Brazil) is a theatre director and lighting designer. She worked as lighting designer and assistant director to José Celso Martinez Correa of Teatro Oficina Uzyna Uzona from 1991 to 2000. Since 1999 she has been artistic director of the theatre group Cia. Livre of São Paulo. She has taught Lighting Design and Directing at the Theatre Department of ECA/USP since 2006.

Post from Brazil

From: Juliana Pardo



Women's Daring

São Paulo, June 2008.

I have been enchanted by the Sea Horse play¹ of the Zona da Mata Norte, a region of Pernambuco in Brazil, ever since I got to know about it; perhaps because, as an actress and dancer, I try to break down the borders between dance and theatre. In this play I found the indivisible line in which dance, theatre and music are mingled and confused in the bodies and actions of the *figureiros* (performers).

I believed that to give my body the strongest impression of the universe contained in the Sea Horse play, I should first experience it in its place of origin, directly with its masters and players. In 2000 I moved from the largest Brazilian metropolis, São Paulo, to a rural region of the state of Pernambuco, the region called Zona da Mata Norte from where the traditional groups of the Sea Horse play originate. I went there with Alício, my work and life companion. One of the reasons that made our four year journey possible was a project we conceived entitled "The rescue and corroboration of the Sea Horse play of the Zona da Mata Norte of Pernambuco" which was accepted by Bolsa Vitae de Artes as part of their historical theatre investigation category. The project helped us take the Sea Horse play and its masters to some municipal schools where the masters themselves could pass on part of their knowledge about the play to children and young people of the community, in keeping with the way that the play has been kept alive orally for generations.

We lived in a village called Chã de Esconso (which means extensive, irregular land); a place surrounded by *jaqueiras* and banana trees, full of sugar cane plantations. It was very pleasant for a region where the all year round scorching climate usually leaves



Juliana Pardo in *Warrior Lady*. Photo: Nimar Laje

the earth completely bare. It is a region without basic amenities, without water pipes and often without any water at all; it is certainly an area of great social deprivation where the economic power is centralised in the hands of a minority.

The Sea Horse play is a Brazilian dance-drama played by men, most of them workers from the sugar cane plantations. Women don't play the Sea Horse; the women of the Zona da Mata region keep to a traditional domestic role: women get married so as not to suffer hunger and to have a place to live. This happens also because the few jobs available are decidedly male, requiring the use of strong physical manual force. To be a woman means to procreate, to take care of heavy household chores, of children, and of husbands who often have macho habits.

As a woman, to enter the play's artistic universe of expression, I had to find equivalent qualities of energy to those of the players; I needed to vibrate on the same

wavelength, with an extremely vigorous and precise force. To be a woman within a male practice, where the dance is marked by strong foot steps beating the ground, was an arduous task.

I remember how many times I asked the masters questions about the play and they didn't answer me. The answers were addressed to my husband, or otherwise they just changed the subject. Stories concerning the Sea Horse play were a man's domain.

One night during a play, a master - Biu Alexandre, of the Sea Horse group of Condado - invited me to present a comic character: a Priest who comes to bless a deceased man and is seduced by his widow, a peppery old woman. I did everything I had been taught: I delivered the text and improvised, but nothing happened, nobody would be my partner and the play didn't exist between us. At the end, I asked the master why nobody played with me during the scene and he answered that it was out of

consideration and respect for my husband. I understood. There was a master's desire to see me presenting a character, but for them the play is a tradition that reflects the local culture and customs, it is not a theatre performance like the ones we actors usually conceive and prepare. And the Sea Horse is a play performed by men who cut cane, a play full of malice and sexual connotations.

I went through many similar experiences, both inside and outside the context of the play. On the other hand the benefit I received changed my life and also the behaviour of some women of the Mata region.

In the town of Camutanga (one of the towns where we realised the Vitae project - where master Inácio Lucindo's Sea Horse group resides), on the first day of class there were only women, girls who were not there for the Sea Horse play but to hear about the event that brought excitement to their small town. My husband organised the musicians, and then in the middle of the school yard I introduced Master Inácio who would lead the teaching of the *trupés* (dance steps). I asked who would like to participate and nobody volunteered. I asked again and one of the girls told me that the Sea Horse is a play for men and that women don't play. It was then that Master Inácio, with the wisdom of a master, said: "...but, my girl, the Sea Horse is for anyone who likes to play. This story of men or women doesn't count. Anyone who likes culture, plays! Anyone who doesn't like it, doesn't play!" And he asked me to lead the girls in the dance so that they could see that I, a woman, played and enjoyed it. The workshop worked so well that today many of those girls are officially part of Master Inácio's Sea Horse group.

In the four year period (2000/2004) during which I was immersed in this field-work, I slowly established a place in the Sea

Horse play. My presence in the plays attracted the attention of the women who attended the night feasts, because it was special that there was a woman playing. Daring, love for the play, courage: it didn't matter, but somehow it posed questions. It did so for Nicinha, who lived in the town of Condado. She confessed to us that she had always wanted to participate in the Sea Horse play; she had even tried to do so sometimes but had always been discriminated against for being a woman. She only got the courage to put forward her wish after seeing my participation in some plays. Today Nicinha is singer and tambourine player in the Sea Horse group of her father, Master Antonio Teles, from the town of Condado, and in addition she has created a Sea Horse group with the children of the town.

Little by little I started being accepted and I created a particular space within the social context in which the Sea Horse play exists, always showing a lot of respect for the masters and for the play. And now they often pass me control of the whistle to lead the play. For some years, the number of women who participate in the Sea Horse play is growing naturally. Most of them are daughters and relatives of the players.

All this experience recorded in my body is presented today in the latest of Mundu Rodá de Teatro's performance, *Warrior Lady*. This performance is also the result of the research exchange between Mundu Rodá and LUME (Unicamp's Interdisciplinary Nucleus of Theatre Research), which fuses acting techniques and Brazilian dramatic dances. *Warrior Lady* searches for a poetic translation that starts from romantic oral tradition and narrates a woman's choice to dress up as a man to go to war, in contemporary time and space, with present-day sounds and words. The character is familiar and recurs in many cultures and civilisations. Through the presentation

of fragments (as is common in oral tradition), more than presenting the life of a woman going to war, the focus of the performance deals with questions of gender and love; dedicated to all the warrior women and all the women of the Zona da Mata Norte region of Pernambuco, who face their silent battles every day.

Once I asked the Master of the Sea Horse play Inácio Lucindo of the city of Camutanga what the Sea Horse play was. He answered: "The Sea Horse? The Sea Horse is culture. It is a star; an extremely shining star that can never be extinguished. Our divine light is the Sea Horse. The Sea Horse is crossed, blessed, holy, it includes the playing of samba, figure stories, *trupé* beats. It includes love. It is loving; it is recorded in our hearts."

Translated from Portuguese by Julia Varley

1. The Sea Horse play of the Zona da Mata Norte region of Pernambuco is a Brazilian drama-dance which combines music, theatre and dance. Traditionally the Sea Horse play happens in the period around Christmas, beginning at nightfall and going on until "breaking the bar of the day" (dawn).

A Sea Horse group is on average made up of twenty members: four or five musicians, a performer of Mateus, of Catirina and of Bastião, the Master (or Sea Captain), five Gallants, a Lady, a Pastorinha, a Harlequin and three *Figureiros* (performers). The musical instruments used are the *rabeca* (string instrument with bow similar to violin), the *pandeiro* (tambourine), one or two *bajes* and a *mineiro*. During the play the musicians sit on a wooden bench, in the same order as the instruments presented above. The musician's group is called *banco* (bench). The audience defines the stage space making a circle starting from the bench. The stage space is called the Sea Horse circle.

The Sea Horse dance is characterised by strong beating steps called *trupés* that mark the rhythm of the play. Among these *trupés* is the *mergulhão* (immersion) during which each participant challenges another to develop a game of readiness and abilities.

The plot of the play develops as follows: the Sea Captain (also called Master of the play), wants to make a feast in honour of the three Magi Kings.

He already has the 'bench' (musicians) and he needs 'figures' (characters) for the play. The first figure of the evening appears, Seu Ambrósio, a salesman of figures who negotiates with the Captain which characters should appear in the play. He demonstrates each one of them by imitating their specific shape, physical actions and steps. Once the business is concluded, Mateus and Bastião (clowns) enter the circle. They are contracted by the Captain to take care of the space keeping the play under control. They are the only figures to remain performing from beginning to end. The Captain says he will go away, leaving Mateus and Bastião in charge of the play, although in fact they don't do so. The Soldier of Gurita enters the circle to arrest the two of them. There is a fight scene during which the two are imprisoned re-establishing order. The Soldier leaves and Mateus and Bastião continue the play. Other figures appear in the play, always announced by the 'bench' through specific *toadas* (songs). In general, in between each figure there is a small interval filled in by tunes and *trupés* that are danced by the members of the group for the audience. The climax of the play is the scene of the Captain's return from his long journey. He returns with his Gallantry (representing members of his family and/or an escort of soldiers). The Gallants and the Captain dance in honour of the Magi Kings, showing several choreographic evolutions and sometimes using bows of coloured ribbons. This is a moment of great visual impact. The songs and *loas* (poems) of this part of the play talk about Jesus Christ's birth, the Magi Kings and São Gonçalo of Amarante (a matchmaking saint). At a certain point the Captain appears mounted on his horse and other choreographic evolutions are executed. Then the dawn figures start to appear. The last scene tells of the death and resurrection of the Bull. In this passage of the play, the bull is killed by Mateus and Bastião; the Captain calls for the Medicine Doctor who examines the Bull and concludes that it cannot be saved. He decides then to share the Bull's meat. After the sharing a sequence of tunes begins to resurrect the Bull and make everyone happy. At the end all form a great circle singing and dancing the Coconut Farewell that finishes the play.

The photograph on page 107 is by João Kehl.

JULIANA PARDO (Brazil) is an actress, dancer and scholar of the Mundu Rodá de Teatro group. Since 2004, she leads a Sea Horse play group in São Paulo and hosts visits of her masters from Pernambuco.

Post from Brazil

From: Priscilla Duarte



Rio, July 2008

Dear Julia,

When we said goodbye yesterday after our meeting beside the beautiful beach of Copacabana in the suave carioca winter, I continued to think about our conversation.

Your question: "And what are you doing nowadays?" unravelled one story after another. I realised I still have many more to tell about the particular experience I am having now while developing a cultural and artistic project in the slums (*favelas*) of Rio de Janeiro.

As I told you, my group, Teatro Diadokai, is part of the Cooperative of Autonomous Artists that brings together theatre, music, circus and popular-culture artists and who conceive events for spaces officially designed for culture and also for other kinds of marginal spaces.

The project Cultural Territory, which had its first edition in 2002, is one of the creations of the Cooperative. The project is sponsored by big businesses within the frame of a competitive publicity system; six years passed before we could accomplish the second edition. The project Cultural Territory supports a network of exchange between the artists of the Cooperative and local communities in partnership with socially engaged organisations that already develop cultural work in those areas. It is a project dedicated to people of low income in which all activities are offered free to the audience. Our programme tries to respond to specific demands according to each community's characteristics and in agreement with the cultural organisation with which we are collaborating. For three weeks, the artists of the Cooperative present their performances and make others in partnership with local artists, as well as offering workshops in many different fields.

This year, we returned to Serrinha, in Madureira, on the periphery of Rio, where we had already performed in the first edition of the project. Serrinha has a particular geographical disposition. It is divided in two: the poorer part of the population lives

up on a hill and the slightly less poor live at the foot of that same hill. I should also add that, because of its strategic location, the drug dealers' organisation has its headquarters at the top of the hill. As in all the slums of the city, the drug business dominates the community, through force and violence, establishing laws and, paradoxically, guaranteeing benefits, very often taking the State's role. Serrinha is no exception.

Therefore, any outsiders like us who want to enter this territory need to establish a dialogue and to obtain the dealers' consent. Otherwise it would be very risky and even impossible to cross two kinds of barriers: the first of improvised barricades made of stones, tree branches, rusty refrigerators that block the traffic of vehicles in certain streets; the other, more intangible, is determined by a social *apartheid* that limits these communities' contact with the rest of the city.

For the good development of the project and the safe accomplishment of its events it was essential to guarantee the participation of a local middleman who has free access to contact the drug dealers. We also contacted the military police section of the area to communicate that we would be realising the project in that period. Our concern was not to count on police protection but to make sure, or have the illusion, that there would not be police interventions in the community while the project lasted. An action of that kind often ends by striking the very people it should protect.

The Cultural Territory project always begins with a procession in the streets of the community. In Serrinha we were about thirty artists who, wearing coloured costumes and stilts, carrying flags and playing live music, went along the streets in the lower part of the slum at the foot of the hill. Surprisingly for us, our opening procession had almost no audience participation.

The people saw us go by but they didn't follow us; some spied from their windows, but they didn't leave their homes to dance with us. What had we done wrong?

Little by little we began to get some clues in order to understand why the people did not trust us. Some days before, the police had invaded the slum for yet another direct confrontation with the dealers, in accordance with the current harsh policies of the Safety Office of the State Government. Two young dealers had been killed. The community was mourning the loss of their sons and we didn't know. Unintentionally we had been inopportune, proposing a day of celebration at a time of grief.

I had the suspicion that something was wrong while I was getting ready for the final part of the procession. In that last scene there is a duel between the Bull - a big mask from Brazilian popular culture inside which an actor dances animating a stylised bull - and Death - a character from a Teatro Diadokai performance that had, as its theme, the classic characters of Rio's carnival.

To everyone's surprise at a certain point in the scene, while the Bull danced surrounded by musicians and other players, the figure of Death appeared in the background on top of a ravine. The costume I wore - on stilts, my body covered by a tight black outfit with a human skeleton painted in white, a skull mask and a long black cloak lined in red - made a strong impact.

As soon as I had finished putting the costume on, while waiting hidden for the right moment to come on stage, I was discovered by some children who turned pale with fear when they saw me. From behind the mask I had a feeling of how powerful my figure was, even more so because of the context in which we were.



Opening parade of the *Cultural Territory* project in Serrinha. Photo: Guito Moreti

After we found out about the youngsters' deaths, I started to imagine how many other stories of violent deaths existed there that we knew nothing about. The comment of the local matriarch, Tia Maria do Jongo, was revealing: "A very beautiful procession, I only didn't like that death thing at the end..."

Our wish was to make a scene to 'exorcise' death. After having been pushed down from the stilts and having disappeared under a white cloth, I was reborn in another costume, reappearing with a beautiful full flowery skirt. The Bull was also reborn and we all danced together. But our metaphor was not interpreted in the way that we intended and, involuntarily, we ended up

creating a bad feeling by placing Death as the protagonist of the scene that concluded our performance.

That day the programme continued with a *Roda-de-samba* facilitating a meeting between the musicians of the Cooperative and the local musicians, including Tia Maria and the Jongo da Serrinha singers. In these kinds of samba meetings the musicians sit around a long table and the audience is around them, in turn standing up to sing and dance in a big feast. Once again, despite the very good music, the audience was shy, except for the children who formed a beautiful group of enthusiastic dancers.

Gradually we started to understand that the Jongo da Serrinha Cultural Group,

which had been our partner in the first edition and should inform everyone about the activities of the project, was now in a weak position within the community. In 2006 there had been a split in the group and the most traditional faction ended up being isolated while the other, led by people not originating from the community, had become stronger. Being introduced by the former faction was not good for us.

This whole situation became clearer for me the day that we presented the Diadokai performance *Pedro and the Wolf* in the slum at the top of the hill, where the headquarters of the dealers are. In reality, the idea of presenting a children's performance came as a last minute impulse. After the *Roda-de-samba*, when we realised that our audience was mostly composed of children, we thought the demonstration performance about the actor's work that was programmed for that day would not have been welcome.

We were very well received at the top of the hill in the Jongo da Serrinha Cultural Group venue. I knew the room from the previous edition of the project, but I thought it looked poorly maintained. In fact, we discovered later that the drug dealers have been slowly appropriating the space for themselves, keeping the fireworks that are used to signal the police's arrival in the bathrooms, and occupying the room that has a privileged view of the hill's surroundings.

I knew that our presence there counted on the dealers' consensus. I had been led to the place by one of our local middlemen. On the way there we had crossed one of the dealer's sentinels. He had a very good view from the edge of the cliff and he was holding a walkie-talkie radio in his hands so he could inform his colleagues of any suspicious movement happening in the vicinity of the hill. I then had the exact notion of how ambiguous and complex this local reality is. At the same time as the residents are

hostages to the dealers' power, they live together with them in the same neighbourhood. After all, the youths that circulate with rifles are the same ones who, when they are not 'working', fly kites with their friends. The sentinel and my guide greeted each other in a friendly way, as neighbours do because, in fact, that is what they really are.

While putting up the set we profited from the solidarity of other neighbours who lent us a ladder and hammer and who anxiously waited for the hour when the performance would start. While the children crowded around, playing just outside the room, a young boy of about fifteen years old calmly strolled close by with a rifle hanging on his shoulder. In spite of the limited technical conditions, the performance went very well with a consistent audience of about sixty spectators, the majority were children who had never been to theatre before. But the young boy with the rifle didn't come to see us.

Another activity that was part of our programme was a meeting with Tia Maria, the representative of the generation that rescued the *jongo* from extinction, and Anderson Quak, the young director of the Companhia do Tumulto, a theatre group linked to CUFA (Central Única das Favelas) of Cidade de Deus, our partner in the next stage of the project. The idea was that Tia Maria could tell stories of the *jongo* and of the Serrinha to a new generation coming from the different reality of the compound of slums of Cidade de Deus. Once again, it was a family-like, intimate meeting that took place in the back yard of Tia Maria's house, with the presence of the representatives of Cidade de Deus, our project's team, as well as Tia Maria herself and a few other members of the Jongo da Serrinha Group.

Tia Maria told us stories of the time

before the hill was used as headquarters by drug dealers and when people could circulate freely at any hour. The women met to wash clothes at the community waterspout. It was the time when people visited each other and parties were frequent; the time of birth of one of the more traditional samba schools of the Rio carnival, the Império Serrano. In that context, *jongo* - a form of expression that integrates percussion, collective dance and magical-poetic elements - bloomed in Serrinha. It has its roots in the culture, rituals and faiths of the African people brought to Brazil as slaves. Tia Maria's speech alternated moments of strong emotion, recalling her companions and Mestre Darcy do Jongo¹ and his mother, the grandma Maria Joana Rezadeira, founders of the group, as well as several other personalities of the samba world. Other moments were melancholic and nostalgic making us understand that "times are different now".

We were already halfway through the project, when we noticed that things were not going as we would have liked with respect to the performance attendance. We summoned the partners of the Jongo da Serrinha Group for an evaluation meeting to try to outline the difficulties together and conclude the project in the best possible way. For the closing we had programmed a June Feast.² We were worried that again the public would not come. We could count on

the help of the Jongo people to mobilise the locals to come to the feast, but it seemed to us that they were not sufficiently engaged in the task. At a certain point we got to know that out of principle the Jongo da Serrinha Group would not dialogue with the drug dealers. This factor certainly limited our involvement with the community.

Considering the insufficient readiness of the Jongo members, I cannot help mentioning a person who was always present at crucial moments of the project: Suelen. This nineteen year old girl was our guardian angel, or the Territory Muse as we affectionately nicknamed her. Omnipresent and tireless, she always seemed to be in the right place at the right time. It was she who solved several problems at the last minute, organised the presentation of the children's workshops, asked the neighbours to lend brooms so that we could sweep the street for the closing feast, provided our lunch prepared by her mother, etc. Her most notable performance, still at the beginning of the project, was on the day when we presented the performance *Divino Emaranhado*. At the decided hour, there was nobody to watch. Suelen went around the neighbourhood and in a few minutes she returned followed by about forty children. The audience was guaranteed. In spite of her energy and character, we thought that for the closing feast of the project, we needed a partner of more weight.

1. My first meeting with Mestre Darcy was in 1987, during a visit to Serrinha organised especially for Eugenio Barba, who was in Rio and wished to see the *jongo*. We were received in Mestre Darcy's home. Barba and our small group of young actors also visited the *terreiro* of grandma Maria Joana. Afterwards Mestre Darcy took us to the top of the hill where today the street block is occupied by the drug dealers and there in the mud he showed us a *jongo* dance barefoot.

2. The June Feast originated from Europe and was brought to Brazil by the Portuguese in the colonial era. It usually takes place in the month of June. These feasts achieved great expression in the Northeast region of Brazil, making homage to three catholic saints: São João, São Pedro and Santo Antônio. Its typical dances are of French (*quadrilha*) and Spanish (*pau de fita*) origin. Indigenous, African and European immigrants' influences still determine the typical food and music that accompany the dances.

And what weight! At the last moment, we managed to make an alliance with the ideal partner: Risadinha (meaning giggle), the president of the Residents' Association. As his name indicates - a character with many extra kilos, blond hair that had lost its colour and thick ropes (of gold!) hanging heavily from his neck - Risadinha was very nice and made himself available to help us. In every slum, one way or another, the Residents' Association is invariably linked to the drug dealing. They need to be in contact to guarantee some basic services to the community. The drug dealers have power over the supply of gas flasks, postal distribution and garbage collection, among other things. And much more besides: we heard that they promote street feasts, support the residents' football games on Sundays with free barbecues and beer and that they even finance the funerals of relatives of the poorest families. With Risadinha on our side, we were more confident. He promised that he would organise stalls for the residents interested in selling food and drink on the feast day. And so he did.

We decided to set up our June Feast in the street, more precisely in a corner where there was an area of cemented ground, at the foot of the main stairs giving access to the hill. This place, at night, is where the drug dealing happens. An intense movement of motorcycles supplies the consumers/clients. Under the gaze of a cliff watch sentinel, whom we could see at the top of the hill, the Cooperative team spent the whole morning preparing the feast. The technicians were in charge of the sound system and lights for the live music show; others decorated the space hanging coloured flags and lanterns from post to post, with the lively help of the children.

With other companions, I took charge of sweeping the stage area and the street. I



Priscilla Duarte pays homage to Tia Maria do Jongo.
Photo: Guito Moreti

began to notice that a strange kind of container was amassing amid the garbage: they were small plastic capsules with a lid, in the shape of a long, fine finger, but of different calibre, from the smallest to the thickest. My suspicion was confirmed by a resident who was helping to put up the flags: it is the newest packaging for selling cocaine. It is very practical because it allows for immediate consumption, saving the small tube and the surface on which to deposit the powder. It is enough to open and inhale. The price varies according to the size of the capsule. I wondered what the original use of those containers was... The manufacturer of the capsules must have a good income.

The Feast was good! On the same

ground that we had swept, children and the Jongo dancers danced barefoot. The music infected everyone and finally an impressive number of residents appeared to give prestige to the closing of the project. We danced, sang and had fun until sunset. When the movement of motorcycles resumed we began to suspect that it was time to close down the event. We were sure when we saw one of the bikers armed with an enormous silver pistol. It was time to take down the feast and to leave the space to the night trade.

I was very happy with the success of the Feast, with having managed, at least for some hours, to transform the space of that corner into a colourful set with music, dance and joy. But, at the same time, I felt a pressure in my chest that later translated into a sensation of impotence, of facing a very complex reality that goes well beyond any possibility of intervention, where our action as artists has its limitations.

As soon as we got on the bus that would take us back to the South Area (where the richest neighbourhoods of the city are located and where the artists of the Cooperative live), the dealers would conquer the space of that street corner again with their drug trade, until the day of the next police invasion or the next fight between rival factions, or persecution by

former-police militias. Or until the next social, artistic, educational, health or other kind of project takes its small contribution to these people, while the State persists in its absence.

Translated from Portuguese by Julia Varley

The photograph on page 111 is by Guito Moreti

PRISCILLA DUARTE (Brazil) is an actress, costume designer and physical training teacher of the Teatro Diadokai, and founding member of the Autonomous Artists Cooperative of Rio de Janeiro. She worked for nine years (1989/94 and 2003/07) as actress and collaborator of the Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo (Italy). She has a degree in Stage Arts from the University of Rio de Janeiro, has trained in Indian classic Orissi dance theatre and in the GDS Method of Muscular Articulation.