

# Post from Peru

**Teresa Ralli, Ana Correa, Rebeca Ralli, Débora Correa, Julia Varley and Cristina Gutiérrez Ruiz**

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A sequence of letters prompted by the Magdalena Project Meeting held in Peru in November 2006.

## From: Yuyachkani

Lima, January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006

Dear Magdalenas,

Today is January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 and we symbolically begin the year by writing this letter.

Many moons have passed from that first meeting with you, a meeting that was inspiring and encouraging for the flow of our own dreams as women and actresses.

Every now and then we meet in some part of our planet; not as often as we would like. Magdalena has grown; it is as if her hair is growing longer and longer, reaching many corners, cultures, languages; always plaiting dreams and experiences, painful at times and other times full of hope, happiness and courage. We have gone on working in our country, in our group and also individually; we have grown as human beings and women and we have tried to share this development with other women around us.

In this year 2006, it seems that it is now time for us to open our doors and warmly welcome the old Magdalenas. We want to have you with us: we want to make a Magdalena in Magdalena del Mar. We have dreamt of this Meeting for a long time, we dream of sharing, exchanging, offering our work, of listening to you and seeing you speak and act. To make a bonfire - even if only in our garden - and drink some *pisco* late at night and laugh and tell each other stories. Make an offering to the *pacha mama*, an offering from many countries so that she can return them to us in the form of fruit to share.

This is also a time of change for our country, although the horizon is uncertain, the changes always bring something good. We will have presidential elections and to speak of this in Peru - which lacks memory so much - is delicate. With our Magdalena, we wish first to spread out to lots of theatre women and then to female and male citizens; we want to irradiate the good



Ana Correa and Débora Correa in a theatre action beside the *El ojo que llora* (the eye that cries) monument based on witness given by women from Ayacucho. Photo: Gam Klutier

things we know how to do: to knit the threads of memory, believe in creativity, affirm ourselves in the stories that awaken memory, make hope infective. We simply want a communion of happiness between old and young women. We dream all of this for our Magdalena.

We feel strongly accompanied, because Patricia Ariza and the women of La Candelaria are going along the same path. We will make a connection, not only from one border to the other, but also from memory to memory. And that fires our motors with more intensity. We want you to know that we are expecting you with everything, with your performances, workshops, demonstrations. We and many young actresses and actors are here and want to learn from you.

We know that the Encounter of Magdalenas in Bogotá will be the first days of November. In Lima, Peru, the Meeting will be from 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2006.

We are knocking on all the doors to be able to cover the budget of the event, including Embassies and other organisations. We are willing to carry out the administration that you consider necessary, sending letters to the institutions that can cover your travel and daily allowances.

With all our love and waiting for your answers,  
Teresa, Ana, Rebeca and Débora



## From: Julia Varley

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Holstebro, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2007

Dear Teresa, Ana, Débora and Rebeca,

Strong images remain with me from our meeting in Peru. I remember Teresa dressed in white and with a coloured hat on her head as she entered the labyrinth. We all followed her after seeing Ana and Débora's work in progress. We were accompanied by the sound of flutes and drums of Andean music. Your colleagues of the Yuyachkani theatre group were playing outside, their faces covered by huge feather head dresses. Each one of us held a branch of flowers that we should put down as we walked along the path. We advanced through a labyrinth of stones in the middle of which is *El ojo que llora* (the eye that cries), the sculpture in the shape of an eye from which flows an uninterrupted stream of water. The labyrinth is in a park in the centre of Lima, Peru, where you took us one morning of the Magdalena Meeting. It is one of the many initiatives in honour of memory.

As I entered, I looked down: beside the track where I was walking, there were thousands of stones laid in order, one next to the other, slightly overlapped. There is one stone for each victim of the war between the Peruvian army and Sendero Luminoso, which lasted more than twenty years and ended in 2000. Some stones are carved with the name of a person, the age and year of death; other stones are smooth, still waiting to receive a name. Looking down, I continued to walk seized by anguish and a sense of impotence. I thought of the day, a few months earlier, when I was walking in the fields near Phnom Pen where, together with human bones, the earth reveals the clothes of the thousands and thousands of Cambodians eliminated by the Khmer Rouge. What can be done? What can be said? It seems that there is no answer to the terrible perversions of human history, which only knows how to repeat itself. How can we fight this common evil that unites such distant countries?

In front of me Teresa walked on; I was followed by many other women whom you four Yuyachkani women had gathered in Lima for the Magdalena theatre meeting. The Andean music gave us a common pace. The path was long and winding. We walked along it slowly, in silence, with a rhythm dictated by heavy thoughts. After about forty minutes, I reached the sculpture in the centre: the eye that cries. I observed it for a long time, trying to understand. Then we had to walk back all along the same path to get out. The stones along the track were now viewed from the opposite direction so the carvings could not be read anymore.



Ceremony at the *El ojo que llora* monument during the Magdalena Festival in Lima, 2006. Photo: Gam Klutier

Automatically I raised my eyes, and with my eyes my head also rose, and following my head, my body became erect and regained energy. The rhythm of my steps increased. The distance to cover and the simple obligation of placing one foot in front of the other, of having to continue in order to reach the exit, changed the attitude of my body. Once again I started to look up, ahead, out, to think of the future. This is what we can and must do: keep on walking. The action of walking decides.

I remember another moment from the Magdalena in Lima when we were sitting in a circle. About thirty young actors were listening to my answers to their questions. They asked about technique, politics, meaning, in an attempt to imagine the future that awaits them. We worked together with voice to search for some answers. They asked me why I continue to make theatre after so many years with the same group, Odin Teatret. Within myself, in a hidden corner, I recalled how, a few days earlier, while reading an introduction to a Brazilian edition of essays by Bertolt Brecht, I had the intuition that in order to safeguard the memory of the group and its director Eugenio Barba, I need a presence which guarantees authority to what I do. If for one reason or another, Eugenio were no longer at Odin, *how* could I remain faithful to his vision and embrace his legacy without his presence? But I didn't say this. Instead I explained that at the beginning, wanting to overcome the division in myself between the study of history and philosophy and the practice of sport, my ideal was to create a wholeness of my being. That is why I had chosen theatre. But talking to them and watching the young faces around me, seeing their reactions, suddenly I understood that my ideal is actually to be divided. I would like my being to divide and exist in these *others* who were right at that moment looking at me and listening to me.

For all of this I thank you, hoping we will meet again soon, with lots of love,  
Julia



## From: Cristina Gutiérrez Ruiz

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Lima, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2007

Dear women of *The Open Page*,

I am only writing now, after a long process which took place in the year that is finishing. I took many steps along my way after the meeting of the Magdalena Project in Lima. It is difficult for me at times to articulate and maintain the actress, the producer, the director with the pedagogical responsibility; all those parts that make up a creative woman artist, in these times changing so quickly. You will realise I am just beginning and the path in front of me is wide and long and needs perseverance. That is where I am now.

For this reason it was incredibly stimulating to see such complete actresses and to get to know about them at the Meeting. I also try to maintain communication with the Yuyachkani women, but I understand that it is difficult... This is also the reason for writing to you at the end of the year. I thank you for this opportunity.

At the Magdalena Meeting I heard: "My intelligence is in my feet, I think with my feet...", "My body remembers what my conscience does not...", "To listen with the eyes; the feet in the head and probably the heart in the mouth, the ears in the hands, to smell with the skin, and all the senses rotating among them..." "To work with exercises that teach the actress's body to think..." and then the sentence which touched me most: "Before I searched for unity, now I try to divide myself amongst you..." Julia Varley said this to young actors and actresses as we were gathered around her for a meeting at the Magdalena Project in Peru in 2006.

It was then that the question came up strongly: what should the apprenticeship of an actress be? Both in the training (physical and vocal) and in how we open up to what life presents to us as human beings, so as to accumulate it in our memory or choose how we want to live. How does an actress behave in everyday life? Should the human being have some kind of training, to manage to be united?

The Magdalena was a deeply moving experience. Sometimes I have read and heard my director speak of these same principles, but it was special to see the presence of the different women dance and mark the space and at the same time hear those actresses tell us how they reached that point. This resulted in something more than an impulse and inspiration: they pointed at the colours on the horizon... I can follow something of your work through the Internet. I can see that to maintain



Teatro Vichama in *Cuando la Piel Habla*. Photo: Vichama archive

a group it is indispensable to *persevere*, an essential word for me these days.

*Creator* is another word which I understood the meaning of a little more when I could drink from your experience. More than a word, it is for me today an essence: I am creating my own approach, in spite of social and personal contrasts. On that way it is necessary to be engaged every day...

I am trying to create every day a *human* woman who recognises herself in herself and in others, who loves life and all that flourishes in it; who sees herself within a social environment and context, caring for life with compassion (not in the Christian sense) and who believes in her feminine identity and strength.

I try to be an *actress*, an artist learning every day, researching and reflecting, who does not see herself as alone, but wants to build in communion and community with her female and male colleagues and her witnesses, the spectators; who wants to make coherence a basic value of her practice; who defends her work space (in terms of territory and time) and who infects the others with the same feelings.

It is at this point that the word *perseverance* appears to me infused with a lively quality, because always when there are problems, within the group or outside it, the actress and the creative work is affected, even though often it is the work that heals us and ties us to the other dimensions of experience.

I try to be an *actress* who also sees her work as completely political, who does not distance herself nor is indifferent to politics, and who believes highly in the community form.

Imagining a woman *director*, one of the clearest things for me was the feet in the head. I remember Julia placing her shoes on her head, trying to explain why she did this. I had my first experience as a director this year: I met with a group of teenagers and we built an action on the theme of water; a theme that here in South America and in the entire world is affecting us a lot, and will do so increasingly. It concerns us particularly because Villa El Salvador, a town to the south of Lima, was originally a desert. In fact the whole city of Lima is a desert. Without knowing beforehand of the world problem, we had already experienced the shortage and that is what we started to create from.

I am still in the stage of my life when I begin to observe, and of course I do so as an actress. But there are many differences between the actress's time that is the present and the director's time that is in the future. The other Magdalena teachers also pointed this out: a female director does not show the creative process, but is part of it.

I need more time to think about the *organisation*, to make it *organic* as the word itself indicates, not to fall in pure action as the director needs to have a vision and be a little ahead.

The *teacher*: to be able to create antecedents for myself and others not just with techniques but life experiences as well.

How can I learn to interpret my everyday actions, when in times of explicit globalisation we interact in a constant intercultural condition, and we perform not only on traditional stages or in the spaces called theatre rooms but are everywhere? How can I learn to interpret my daily actions, when the division between audience and actress breaks down and the spectators are not only in their seats but also at my side and I am even a spectator myself?

How can I know how to perceive the senses of everyday life, understand, recreate and give them life again? Which senses should be created? Those that detonate? Or those that affirm something of the identity of the person who receives them and helps to cultivate humanity?

What should the quality of the physical action be, while the world, and with it all visual and auditory work, advances quickly, and the spectators' retina shapes itself at the speed of an image as well, and we are getting used to this speed, thanks to the help of technology? And how can the single unified body of an actress or actor quieten and capture the attention of the so-called spectators? Although I believe that searching for the sense that makes concrete all that is not truly seen in everyday life, actors manage to create images that build the connection with other bodies that go beyond the senses and move. But how do we go in that direction?

What should the body of the actress be? That body which is inhabited by many presences? And how does it place its centre, so as not to get lost in the relationship between aesthetics and ethics?

Spaces that facilitate this pedagogical knowledge and favour its transmission are necessary. Those of us actresses and actors who have just started need an accessible road. Of course I am not alone; my colleagues are with me, although we are now in a transitional phase in the group. Here another

question arises: how to follow the collective life and be able to maintain it?

I need to enter more into theatre apprenticeship and other spaces that have opened themselves to me. I know what tools I lack and those I hope to attain next year. I need this for myself and for other young people like me: to have the opportunity to get to know the world of theatre and what this permits me and then return home, to our centre, to find myself again and then share what I have discovered.

Villa El Salvador subsists in very poor economic conditions. For this reason my survival affects my plans a lot, as I have to make a living, in order to feed the actress to help strengthen a body that can react to everything. Often we cannot have what would be useful for our development. Because of this schools are not in our plans either. But Vichama, which is like our school, our director César Escuza, the other group colleagues and most of all creativity, help us find a wealth of materials to create within these limits. It is very difficult to get books here. They are very expensive in the bookstores. Could you sell us some at a special price? I agree that their price is fair, but if you can please make an exception, we could make a collection in the group. A theoretical part is also necessary for our apprenticeship... please, if at least you could try and see ...

Yes, I search, will search and create my own way... and as someone said at some point, each path is different; you make it, but it is good to find company, travelling street partners for a long itinerary or for the whole way... where you find light that guides you, to continue on your own road, guided by intuition and constant awareness.

Because of this I would like to listen, read, recognise, feel, know what the apprenticeship was like for other actresses, women, female teachers, how their journey towards the profession was researched; yes, even in the small details! What came first? How did it connect to the group? What did they feel? How did the engagement in political movements and the political situation of their country change their lives?

Now Peru has signed the treaty of free trade with the United States. This is very worrying, many social aspects, especially in culture, rebellion and work are in danger. There is a lot to do so that the monster doesn't swallow us and this could possibly be the beginning of a new creative process.

Well then, with a deep gratefulness, I wish that the New Year will bring you hope, health and solidarity in abundance.

A strong hug,  
Cristina





## From: Teresa Ralli

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Lima, September 18<sup>th</sup> 2007

Dear Julia,

How are you? Here we are basically well. It seems like a century ago that we were here together in the Festival, which was fantastic. We are finishing the season of the *Músicos Ambulantes* celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this performance. I hope it is the only work which will have so many birthdays. And of course, we are also in the theatre space preparing the new production.

Times of creation make me so fragile: as if I were a thin leaf of paper, as if someone took off my skin and left me only with my living flesh. Everything seems big to me and affects me a lot. I feel insecure: one day in nirvana, the next I think nobody listens to me and then another day goes by and I recover my strength. In short, it's a madhouse. And I believe that the older we get the stronger are the creative processes. It should be the other way around, don't you think?

I really enjoy seeing the maturity of some of my colleagues, for example Julian is such a good actor that I am grateful for his sensibility and commitment... even though he forgets his improvisations! Surprisingly, though, I don't have the same transparency with my female colleagues, perhaps because we are all very 'important' and we find it difficult to feel small and apprentice-like again.

The director has prohibited us from speaking during rehearsals. It is amusing that after a lifetime pleading for democracy we reach the conclusion that during the artistic process this cannot be respected!

I am happy imagining the result, I would like to stay in the rehearsal room every day, but we cannot! I am also working on the sacred *Life is a Dream* by Calderón de la Barca, in the role of Fire entering on stage on a... salamander! Fantastic! It is nice to see my son rehearse, as he is also understudying the Man's role.

And finally I applied to the University where I teach and I am now also a student. It is hilarious because I have two cards, one as a professor and one as a student and I use the one that is best for me each time. I love to sit at my desk and the courses I am taking are wonderful: History of Peru, Philosophy, Rhetoric. When I am sitting there I would like to devote myself only to being a pupil.

I had planned to meet you in Cuba in January, but I believe that the most important thing now for us is to finish the new work and we have to stay in the

theatre in January; we will see what happens next summer.

Well, dear Julia, we will let you know how things go with Maria [Porter]. It seems that everything has changed in this city after the earthquake, people behave differently and there is absenteeism in many and different kinds of activities. We still haven't filled the workshop and we are dealing with this now. I have told my female colleagues that I would like to invite Brigitte Cirila with the show we saw in Holstebro that she made with her partner, and to have a real go at voice work, an aspect that theatre people here don't take seriously enough. So I will start sending letters now to get support. And you? Would you have time to jump over here and make a distillation of voice research? Brigitte for singing and you for text?

Fond memories and a very strong hug for you and the same for Eugenio, I still have his laughter in my ear from when we spoke on the phone from Norway.

Teresa

Lima, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2007

My dear Julia,

I have just come back from walking through the labyrinth of the *El Ojo que Lloro* Memorial after it was damaged the other night by Fujimori followers. Many artists, actors and actresses, painters, sculptors and musicians met there. Lika Mutal, who created the labyrinth, read some paragraphs about our artistic profession. Then we set a table with coca leaves and some objects. Finally we all walked together and at the end they asked me to say some words. I had you present the whole time, remembering those beautiful lines you wrote in the letter you sent me, and that I mentioned in my speech. I had that image the whole time, clearly feeling it in my body, and then feeling the lightness in my body on the way back in the labyrinth. The weight was left behind and I had wings on my feet.

Here we have an expression to refer to somebody who seeks to harm someone else and then it bounces back at him: "He shot backwards". That is what is happening with the Fujimori followers who perpetrated this violent act. I see the stone marked with red-orange-red colour, and I tell myself that even like this it reveals all its beauty and peacefulness. The stone emerges, with the slight thread of water falling as it comes out from the stain, beautiful with its scar. Like the scars that warriors' bodies have showing the cost of their battles, the stone appears serene.

A hug,  
Teresa



## From: Ana Correa

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Lima, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007

Dear Julia,

Thank you for your greetings. They are very important for us. Maria [Porter] arrives in ten days time with a pupil whom she has prepared. We were able to make her sabbatical coincide with our wish to offer a pedagogic space with each one of Magdalena Project's beautiful women.

We want "Seeds of Magdalena" to happen every year. We are already planning to bring Brigitte [Cirla] in 2008.

After our trip to Norway to Grenland Friteater we started working very strongly on the new performance. We are all together again after *Antígona*, *Santiago* and *Sin Título*. In one way or another we hadn't gathered all together since *Hasta Cuando Corazón*. We are happy, but at the same time busy with different jobs to make a living and personal study projects and recordings of our experiences.

Personally I am graduating in Education with Débora and Augusto and afterwards we will get a degree. Our project is that in August of the next year we will have the necessary academic qualifications so as to open a graduation course offered by Yuyachkani. None of us has a degree. Miguel has a Master's in Sociology and Rebeca in Psychology and Sociology.

When I was in Transit I spoke about our group project to Eugenio [Barba] who suggested that perhaps I could get a degree in the anthropology of inter-relationships and in this way open the range of students not only to theatre people but also to teachers and other professions. The idea is to validate the graduation course in Lima, perhaps at La Cantuta University with which I have already had meetings, and then to take it to universities in the provinces of Peru: Ayacucho, Puno, Apurimac, Iquitos, San Martin, and I go on dreaming...

On the other hand I am recording my work demonstration *The Rebellion of the Props* and Débora her *Behind the Mask*. I am also finishing writing about the experience with *Rosa Cuchillo*. I went with Débora to Guatemala and to the Hemisférico Meeting in Argentina with *Kay Punku* and *Willasaqmi* (oral tradition stories of pre-Hispanic women). These stories are developing in relation to the women to whom we have dedicated these works in progress; most of these women have suffered violence because of the forced disappearance, violation and death of their relatives or children. Débora and I have several projects together and this



Ana Correa in her work demonstration *The Rebellion of the Props*. Photo: Jorge Baldeon

space is also very enriching for us as women, sisters, artists and citizens.

I go back to the new performance. We have just had a meeting and we have realised that if we want to have our premiere in February next year we have to work in January. During the last ten years we have taken time in January mainly for our families, since our children have holidays then. However we have agreed to start again with a strong impetus on January 7<sup>th</sup>. This decision means that we are not going to the Magdalena Sin Fronteras in Cuba where I would really like to go. I will write to Roxana [Pineda] later telling her our decision. We had fantastic plans of going there with Teresa and Débora.

Dear friend, I am happy to write and share these projects of ours. You are a great inspiration for my work and my life. A big hug,  
Ana

Lima, March 8<sup>th</sup> 2008

Dear Patricia, Cristina, Bruna, Julia, Geddy, Jill, Roxana, Rosita, Grethe, Cucha, Elbi, Aroma, Teresa, Rebeca, Débora, Mili, Socorro, Jill, Brinton, Susana,

We Yuyachkani women have just arrived home from a small town in the middle of a park of millenary stones, at an altitude of 4,300 metres, where we joined one hundred Andean women, most of them with their small children on their backs. We played, laughed, denounced, danced, listened to stories from the oral tradition and promised to meet again.

We returned quickly because today we prepare the opening of the new performance *El último ensayo*, also for 200 women of Lima's working-class neighbourhoods with whom we will celebrate the 8<sup>th</sup> of March.

This week I received from the Magdalena Latina a Conscientious Objection in which

women from Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador reiterate that no war can be declared in their names: "We have so many struggles in common to start, so many alliances to make, so many unjust situations to correct, so many social wounds to heal, so many songs to sing at dawn, so much peace to build, that it seems at the very least obscene to consecrate our days to the exaltation of arrogance".

This morning when I opened my mail to write to you I received this letter from Aida Nasrallah, a Palestinian playwright, who like me is writing to a group of her most loved friends, telling us:

*Dear women everywhere, dear friends,*

*In honour of the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, I admit that it is hard to wish a happy day, under the horrible situation which we see in Gaza and in Iraq. This situation requires us to unify our efforts to struggle against the humiliation of our nation and for all the nations who live under the same situation. We women who suffer more; we who lose our men, brothers and sons in wars.*

*Women can do much for peace, for good production, we are special creators, every woman in her way is an artist, a woman who prepares the food for her family is an artist, a woman who cleans her house is an artist, a woman who raises her children to love and be sensitive and tolerant towards others is an artist. We have all to join our power to protest against and to finish with wars, for the just treatment of female and male workers.*

*We have to realise that violence exists not only towards women, but towards men too. Then our struggle has to be for the benefit of the whole society in places where there are many humiliated classes who still suffer hunger, low salaries and lack of employment. To my students, sisters, friends, I love you all,*

*Aida*

Raquel, my colleague in playing the healing drums, reminds me that today is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the struggle of 129 women from a cotton textile factory in New York who were murdered for occupying their work place and for demanding a reduction in their working hours. She reminds me of Clara Zetkin at the International Conference of Copenhagen who gave the impulse for the homage to all women who fight for their rights.

It is a day to remember, to continue getting stronger and acting, directing, writing, to continue creating and generating meeting spaces for women artists, to celebrate our stubborn spirit for a more just and inclusive world for all women and men.

I wish you all today lots of song, dance, the firmness of the earth at our feet, the strength of the wind in our hearts, the power of the fire that helps us transmute all that we want to leave behind us, the water that cleans us and allows us to flow, that our healing force should spring forth.

I love you all dear friends and teachers!

Ana

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

ANA CORREA, DÉBORA CORREA, REBECA RALLI and TERESA RALLI (Peru) are all actors, directors and teachers working with Yuyachkani, one of the most important independent theatre groups in Peru and in Latin America, touring nationally and internationally. They also teach at Lima's Catholic University and each of them has developed particular interests such as the Afro-Peruvian dance "El son de los diablos"; Tai Chi and martial arts; Peruvian carnivals and masks; children's theatre; the oral traditions of different minority cultures in Peru, etc. They have all been involved in different events connected with the Magdalena Project since its foundation, organising meetings and workshops in Lima, the most important of which was *Mujeres Creadoras* in November 2006. JULIA VARLEY (Britain/Denmark) has known Yuyachkani since her first tour to Peru with Odin Teatret in 1978 and keeps in regular contact with Ana, Débora, Rebeca and Teresa.

CRISTINA ANGÉLICA GUTIÉRREZ RUIZ (Peru) was born in 1984 and is a theatre actor, teacher and community culture producer. She is responsible for commissioning events for the Foro de la Cultura Solidaria. She started her theatre apprenticeship in 1999 with Vichama Teatro, directed by Cesar Escuza Norero, and is still working with this group based in Villa El Salvador, a peripheral self governing neighbourhood of Lima. Cristina has also trained in Applied Somatic Art, Performance and Contemporary dance and participated in the Yuyachkani women's event as part of her training.



*El ojo que llora (the eye that cries)* monument, by Lika Mutal. Photo: Gam Klutier