

Cora Herrendorf

Words from Exile

I was born and grew up in a city with which I am still in love. I, daughter of Buenos Aires, hopelessly love the smell of those stones, roads, faces that I visualise even without seeing.

Whole universes, dynamic worlds, passions and losses, faces and movements, births and deaths palpitate behind the windows of houses. Woven threads of lives that submerge in the outside world and share its pulse each time they manage to move beyond the doorway. It is not always so, but sometimes this happens.

Suitcases are synthesis, a lot of life contained in a small space. They contain the primary, essential portion of the universe that you leave behind and that you will find again when the journey comes to an end.

In 1976 our young group went beyond the door, from Argentina towards Europe, towards the unknown. People with suitcases, some synthetic and poor theatre costumes, and a date for the return trip, ninety days later. In fact, it was twenty-five years later. That journey never ended, it transformed into exile and the house - that of my universe - was abandoned. The bloody *coup d'état* of the Argentine military surprised us while we were far away, return would have meant a certain end, death waiting for us.

I went back alone two years later, in order to burn my library, embrace my mother and my sister, fill new suitcases with what it was possible to bring away and then depart, towards that new country of my destiny called Italy, where I have always felt a foreigner.

Exile and I have never been friends. I was born and grew up in a city with which I am still in love. I, daughter of Buenos Aires, hopelessly love the smell of those stones, roads, faces that I visualise even without seeing. I often travel within, the steps of my soul take me back there and I am always returning.

The life choice we took then, to play in the open air, is that of travelling always, everywhere, anyhow, anywhere destiny takes us. No return is possible, even when I do go back to my country, because it will never be the same. Our theatre is made and lived by citizens of the world who, armed with vans and lorries, take their tireless message



Cora Herrendorf Photo: Mary Giles

there where the suitcases manage to follow us.

Life in the theatres suffocates us. This is why we choose the street, the squares, the places that belong to no-one and everyone, a land without borders where you can meet your peer without demanding anything, communicating with gestures and dance, music and universal languages.

Since then I have travelled a lot, in countries and across continents; I have travelled across the world of the so called "mad people", working for years with them and learning the humility of being different; in the worlds of prisoners, drug addicts, street children. I have travelled with Horacio and my actors to reveal magnificent secrets and transform them into performances; I have travelled across the mysteries of knowledge and those of meditation; I have travelled dying many times of strange illnesses, to then resuscitate and savour the taste of life once again.

Today I am returning - slowly, full of emotion and wonder - to my country, with a

suitcase full of my art that is now mature and recognised in many places. In these years as theatre director and composer, I have grown. I have become master of actors, mother of now adult children who are actors and work in film, who travel inexorably and freely, who hate the belts that tighten around the waist and want to conquer the whole world. It was the same for my mother, an actress who ran away from Poland because she was a Jew, and for my father, whose parents migrated from Russia: the journey of life repeats itself, the circle of destiny is still open.

Translated from Italian by Julia Varley

CORA HERRENDORF (Argentina/Italy) was an actress with the Yiddish Theatre and with the Comuna Baires in Argentina until she founded Teatro Núcleo with Horacio Czeretok in 1974. The group moved to Italy some years later and Cora has since worked as actress and director as well as conducting research within the field of theatre and therapy.