



Sara Serrano López

The Eyes of an Old Woman

NORWAY, ON TOUR WITH GRENLAND FRITEATER'S *HARDE TAK*, SUMMER 2001

I leave the south of Spain because I want to share a new environment, a different sense of time and another form of expression - this is about work. I come all the way here to feed upon other customs, to recycle human material, to share time with friends at a distance, to get to know about myself in relation to a different context - this is about people.

I land in a new country. After a first superficial look when everything seems the same, I start to discover details and notice differences that catch my attention. I like a new country because of the contrast it has with my own, and I feel comfortable with those things which the two places have in common.

For a short time, I map in my mind clichés that I try to escape from at home. I suppose I try to establish a system in a rational attempt to find elements of support. But I cannot find many concrete examples in my past. At home, people look at what I do in relation to what I have done before. In a new context, the immediate present is the most solid base for my relationship with others. My actions and words are not accompanied by shared past experiences that give different shades of meaning to my behaviour. We know that we share the profession here, but while I look at their work, mine happens hundreds of kilometres away.

I can explain what my thoughts are in conversation, but everything just turns into verbal diarrhoea made up of concepts, while in fact I would like to speak about what moves me. My only alternative is to devote

myself to their work and let people get to know me. I suppose there is a close connection between what interests me in everyday life, my daily behaviour, and the way I translate images, stories and ideas into theatre.

The first impression I receive from some of my tour companions is of their work on stage. This allows me to observe them carefully. As a spectator, I enjoy their performances. As part of the group, I get to know them and recognise them by their way of moving and acting. I smile, noticing gestures and expressions that they lend to their characters and then repeat even when the performance is finished. This is human material.

The difference in language makes this observation easier. As is usual nowadays, English becomes our common language, but life around me happens in Norwegian. The words stop being a system of articulated signs for me and become sounds. I search for meaning in the intonation, and mainly in the eyes and in the body language. It is a decodification mostly based on instinct and provides a very good training for my senses.

From my position as a spectator who does not speak the language, *Harde Tak* adds new challenges to my subjective interpretation. It is a performance where the story and the text, with its poetic and political content, are important, but circumstances change my way of looking at it. I have to focus on the visual aspect, the rhythm and musicality. I question myself about the abyss that separates my understanding of the performance from that of a spectator who shares the language. After several performances I start deducing the meaning of the

words. Even though sounds are a clue for my comprehension, my deduction comes mainly from what I see, not from what I hear. After the show, while exchanging jokes and comments, my unlikely conclusions make me laugh, but on other occasions I am surprised by the coincidence of my guesses. Hidden meanings result in interesting suggestions alongside the literal translation.

A FOREIGNER AT THE FIRE

The shared life continues on tour and it is difficult to find the time to function as an individual. The group imposes itself. I am a new element in a nucleus full of mutual experiences. I am a welcome new member but, at the same time, I am received with the scepticism reserved for the unknown.

Now is the compressed time when my social person is assembled, when people get to know my present actions, without a past with which to explain myself. This meeting with people mostly gives me the strength and inspiration to go on working; it is the most valuable time, but also the most tiring. Then, for just a few moments, I feel I am not there where I belong. But then I lift my head and meet eyes that make me feel at home. They don't belong to anyone I have known for a long time, but they contain a look from the past that I have found in certain other people during my travels. This time it is a woman who is looking and in her eyes I find reflected something familiar that gives me the strength to feel present and to be part of the circle sitting around the fire.

YOUNG WOMAN, ON THE MOVE

My need to travel and my disposition for theatre have in common an interest in the relationship of people to their context. What changes and what remains of a person when the external circumstances alter? Which limitations do we impose on ourselves and which are imposed on us? How many clichés and superficial impressions do we sustain? Why is it that when I feel most distant, someone looks into my eyes and I feel home again?

I crave to see, to get to know, to give, to bring to my corner of the world what moves me and transform it into a creative fruit to be shared. I crave to know that I belong somewhere and that this place is in the eyes of an old woman who moves on.

SARA SERRANO LÓPEZ (Spain) was born in 1974 in Murcia, where she studied drama. She started her own company Teatro Ozono and is preparing her fourth production, *Alicia*. Sara is part of the artist collective La Fragua.