

Yamile Lanchas

Take Advantage of the Tide

*In spite of the growing distance
from my family and friends,
and in spite of visiting
the most exotic and
extravagant places of
the planet, who and what I am
will travel with me
wherever I go.
Whatever problems I have
I take them with me.*

*Ulysses, you must make an irreparable fate your purpose, you must
place the route within, the road is full of traps, of deviations...*

More than one year ago I left home; I left my family, my friends, my work, to go in search of change, in search of new ways to reach at last the ideal Ithaca.

Journeys are a goal in themselves. While new landscapes are being discovered, we also disclose an unknown inner geography. External obstacles reveal internal blocks. Travelling is an art; as an actress I could perhaps say that travelling is like theatre. I would compare acting and travelling from the point of view of *form* as a fixed and steady structure and what is at the base of it in the sense of improvisation and change. When I speak of the form and structure of journeys, I refer to concrete elements like the means of transport, the scheduled time for departure and arrival, the itinerary, a series of concrete and practical actions like stopping over, choosing connections, buying tickets, etc. These are fixed elements, you cannot change them, they belong to the journey. These elements also exist in theatre: the form could be the text, the dead words on paper; or the structure given to the work, like the rehearsals with their timetable and continuity, or some defined roles in which you are actor, director, musician (or everything).

All those who have travelled have experienced the anxiety of missing a plane or a train, of getting lost. When this happens, we don't enjoy the journey and our minds are elsewhere and anxious. I think that in theatre we should not confuse getting out of a mess with the art of improvisation. A true improvisation always springs out of form and structure. When a performer is confident on stage as in life, the essential being can be expressed, because we don't think of *how* to act, but of *what* an action is. The great piano players let their fingers slide on the keyboard playing the piece they know so well while the most sublime music reaches us and cuts right through us.

I conclude that knowing how to handle form allows us to be present, putting our whole being into the action that we carry

out. When we master form, *transformation* occurs, literally going beyond form to reach an inner essential change.

In the course of this year of continuous travelling, I was faced with a clear fact: in spite of the growing distance from my family and friends, and in spite of visiting the most exotic and extravagant places of the planet, who and what I am will travel with me wherever I go. Whatever problems I have I take them with me. We cannot believe that acting difficulties will be solved by changing the play, the group or the director.

But travel also gives something by stimulating the capacity for observation, both of the external world and of oneself. We are interested in what we see for the first time, we establish a dialogue towards the outside that irrevocably also goes within. We begin to get to know ourselves, how we react to danger, to the unknown, to beauty. When actors start discovering themselves through the profession and seeing themselves from the outside, they become aware of the blocks in their work, attaining the necessary conditions to overcome them.

Each time I made a mistake and I got lost or missed a train, I would always reproach and judge myself - "How silly, I missed it again, how foolish I am!" This attitude made me so anxious that I would become paralysed and no longer able to solve anything. After many such mistakes, I decided to calm myself by saying: "If you are more observant and careful, you will understand how things work". So the mistakes were no longer negative because they taught me something I could put into practice. The result was that I stopped judging myself and started to see the positive side in each day. This way it is possible to learn, concentrating on what we need to build a house for example, instead of worrying about what we do not need. Similarly when I stopped judging myself as an actor, I was able to act again and enjoy my work and my presence in every small detail.

I can summarise the experience I got from travelling into three concrete actions that help me in life and in theatre: observation, affirmation of the positive, and being present. That is to say that if I put myself totally in the action or exercise when I have to do something, without doubting, my acting will produce some kind of knowledge. I will reach something positive. Therefore I must also become an observer of my own actions, calmly - as if sailing down a river and enjoying the landscape. This allows me to concentrate, to search for the centre.

It is perhaps during this time that I have understood that the real journey is one which takes me towards my own centre. The journey can be made with help from the outside as well. I received help in the form of a fragment of a letter that arrived when I was on the brink of being shipwrecked:

Ulysses, take advantage of the tide and put up your sails fully, observe the stars and correct your direction. You have to watch out, be alert with your senses not to deviate from the course ... You will not reach Ithaca because you are clever, but for love, stubbornness, conviction, shrewdness. Penelope is inside you since you first departed, she is part of you, she is you.

May none of your trials make you forget your beloved island; you have Ithaca inside yourself. We pray for you every day and we make offerings to the gods; sooner or later they will listen and take your side.

May the winds, Ulysses, be favourable to you.
Eumeo

Translated from Spanish by Maria Ficara

YAMILE LANCHAS (Colombia) was born in Bogotá where she studied literature and theatre. Her journeys to get to know other ways of making theatre are the basis of her next production, which she is working on supervised by Rena Mirecka.