

# Beatriz Camargo

## Breaking the Mirror

*Nothing in this world is given.  
That which must be learned, must be learned with effort.*  
Carlos Castañeda, *The Teachings of Don Juan*

Teatro Itinerante del Sol was born in 1983. Since then it has been dedicated to learning and developing a project called Bio-drama, through production, study, teaching and reflection. For us, the word "bio-drama" indicates continuous research and going against the current by means of our craft and our way of living in Art, Aesthetics and Ethics.

Bios is life; drama is connected with dreams. The mystery of Bios as a creative impulse is tied indissolubly to life and dreams, and therefore to Drama. It is revealed in a kaleidoscopic manner by the myth of creation passed on by the Makiritare Indians through the dynamic and fluid mirrors of memory. All Drama, as life and dreams, is an egg that contains the Yin and Yang energies in an intertwined dynamic form.

Teatro Itinerante del Sol is committed to a path of rupture. Most of all we want to break away from the consumer society in which we live, that wishes to swallow up the whole world. Bio-drama is a celebration of life that integrates all the arts to achieve the ontological primacy of nature. It is an exploration and experimentation that is always in the process of transformation; a creative and pedagogical act of investigation that celebrates memory. Memory within Bio-drama is conceived as past, present and future, a space where all the arts and expressions of being convene in an organic entity which is "art and part" of nature and the cosmos. In Bio-drama music, dance, singing, words, masks, theatre imagery, oral and literary expressions, plastic arts, crafts, millenary knowledge, human and natural sciences, conjugate and/or integrate to celebrate nature in an aesthetic and environmental sense. Teatro Itinerante del Sol has chosen not to let itself be captured and - rather than observe itself in society's mirrors - to return to the deep waters of memory in order to locate its real ancestral body in

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a reflection of the body of Mother Earth.

Because of all this, our form of Bio-drama has its origin in the *cuca* (a barn of a special shape), called *Maloca*, which for our ancestors was the origin of learning. Our *cuca* is placed on a hill that was a desert in 1987, when we moved to Villa de Lleyva, a village five hours drive away from Colombia's capital Bogotá. Today - sixteen years later - this desert has become a botanical garden of native plants of the region: a wood.

The difficulty of cultivating the garden of the Goddess from a desert is the most precise way of telling our story of endless learning. I speak of the garden of the Goddess because everything on the hill is dedicated to her. She is the original source who allows herself to be fertilised in order to create. At the beginning it seemed an impossible, titanic job. The idea of bringing water to this hill was unusual, but finally thanks to digging an aqueduct and connecting the streams it was possible to bring the precious liquid that would help fulfil our dream.

I remember saying to myself at the start: "The aim of this task is that the humming bird should return to this hill." The humming bird is a symbol of fertility and creativity. It is an erotic symbol within our Amerindian mythology. At that time only Grandfather scorpions and Grandmother spiders lived on the hill. In the mythology of the Muisca (an indigenous Colombian tribe) spiders and spider-webs are known as the guide for those who leave this world. There were also some crickets and some very big Mister frogs.

Some of our neighbours were intent on preventing water from reaching the hill. They would cause waste by cutting the hoses as often as they could, while we would patiently mend the damage. One day, red melted candle wax and a lot of shit were left on the water tank: black magic! Desperate I went to the roof of the *Maloca* to scream out in rage: "I give up!" Love - in the form of a

man with green eyes like an animal in heat - calmed me, and I did not give up. Another day, as I was walking with a friend loaded with herbs and flowers, I met the suspect neighbour. He was going up along the path that leads to the hill, riding a donkey. My friend and I offered him some of our branches.

A long time later, the prospect of the wood could be seen. One day, when we were all gathered in the *cuca*, a humming bird suddenly flew in. The miracle had come true! Today humming birds come every day to suck flowers and pollinate them. I thank the great spirit of the Mother Goddess who wanted this to be! Bees, bumblebees, butterflies, sparrows, swallows, *copetones*, *diosmedé*, robins, little birds with red tummies and others with yellow tummies also started coming, and wasps and ants as well. We have chickens, dogs and cats, a whole fauna that continues to multiply. The hill is big. Vast parts are still only covered in grass and we would like to see trees growing there.

After our first success another difficulty arose. In Villa de Lleyva a tree plague is a deadly threat for the plants; we call it *tilancia*. This name indicates a kind of grey moss, a parasite that lives off the plant injecting a virus that dries out the tree and kills it. The wind transports this parasite's spores everywhere in Alto Ricaurte, in the province of Boyacá, where Villa de Lleyva is situated. The spores settle themselves on the branches of trees everywhere; and therefore each little tree needs looking after in order for it not to die.

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take away the *tilancia*. And there is a lot of it.

Today, the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2003, as I sit down to write this text, something magical has happened. After sixteen years of living on the hill, I have just picked seven beautiful fruit. They are figs from a cactus of the kind that grows in Mexico. For the first time in all these years this sweet pink meat has appeared on the plant. Today's lunch was a feast. My daughter, my grandson and I had a great banquet. We ate fruit that had the delicious taste of sixteen years of preparation.

It is also not by chance that I sit and write these words just after having celebrated our twenty years of existence as Teatro Itinerante del Sol in the Teatro Colon of Bogotá. Another delicious fruit! Shared with a grateful audience.

We think of the Teatro Colon as an élite theatre where operas, *zarzuelas*, great performances from abroad or big national productions in the frame of established "classical" theatre are usually presented. Our own performances, although nourished by the mythologies of the world, come from the countryside, from the province. We belong to Boyacá, a mainly peasant region. Our philosophy and aesthetic aim for a mythopoetic that refuses to use cardboard stones. We want to have mainly organic props on stage: real stones and earth, mud, sand, water, corn, wheat or rice, potatoes, beans, flowers, herbs... We present all those elements that really speak of the earth and its relationship with the cosmos.

Our repertory of six productions with all its bric-a-brac entered the Colon, frightening the operators, technicians and those in charge of the theatre to such a degree that we were forced to overcome many controversies in order to reach the end of our stay. They looked at our things as if

they were building materials or market goods, rather than artistic props. The technicians thought we were dirtying their space and not being respectful of the "altar" amongst theatres in Colombia. Up till then only "real" artists had been presented there. The technicians did not understand that in our own fashion we were truly blessing this altar of scenic art. Teatro Colon was built close to the major church of Bogotá, underneath which it is likely that pre-Colombine Muisca altars are buried. The cathedral and all the central part of Bogotá (like Mexico City where temples are now reappearing from under the cathedral) were built over the Muisca village of Bacatá.

Our residency ended with *The Song of Songs*. In this performance, saxophone, bass, percussion and vocal music are combined with theatre imagery and the marvellous text that we use as a pretext for lovingly inter-weaving cultures with wheat, rice, corn and the erotic presence of Afro-Colombians dancing on stage. Our *Song of Songs* ended with us offering the audience the ancient sacred drink called *chicha*.

Finally the technicians and operators understood and accepted us. With a smile, they gratefully drank the delicious millenary drink that has been demonised and prohibited since German beer arrived in Colombia. Many women were tortured and put into prison because they continued to prepare it clandestinely. In Bogotá only one grandmother remains who has the ancestral knowledge to prepare this delicious *nemcatacoic* drink of inebriation. Nemcatacoa was the Dionysius of the Muisca culture, a deity present at every celebration.

We live in an era when men and women together should give consideration to Mother Nature. After five thousand years of endless wars and depravation, Earth is threatened. We ask the great question: "Will we - men and women together - witness the

beginning of the era when love is the only condition that can produce the desired wisdom and awareness that all human species are also part of nature? The human species that throughout the centuries always seem to have run away from the possibility of Utopia..."

Like the Keres Indians of Laguna Pueblo, we remember that there is a Spirit over everything that is capable of producing a strong song and radiant movement, and of entering and leaving the mind. For the Keres, woman is at the centre of everything. Nothing can be made sacred, cooked, ripened without her blessing and consideration. We have forgotten Earth and likewise we have turned our backs on and even suppressed the female spirit. In the last five thousand years, so called civilisation and progress have taken over the world, resulting in the globalisation that dominates today, leaving the *essential feminine* aside.

Until recently women's struggle was for basic rights in order to be accepted within a system that continues to be unilateral and hierarchical. Therefore we have found ourselves playing with the same laws and norms, repeating and reproducing what they endorse: property, consumerism, exploitation, marketing, war... We have even reached such absurd extremes as to talk of marketing culture, as if sacred visions and dreams could be included in such a commercial reality.

But Utopia is possible. We - men and women - are beginning to understand that our struggle is not against men as such, but instead to acknowledge the question of gender, in relationship to the power and laws that are destroying Mother Nature and the species itself. If we re-create, we can re-invent an earth where all those who inhabit it can be valued. Utopia will have come true.

We know that the established history of

theatre reflects the established history of the world. It is exactly this mirror that we have tried to break during all these years of resistance. This has been our transgression, our way of going against the current.

As in history, the female role in the established theatre has been conditioned by the representation on stage of the interests of power, property, hierarchy, limits, frames, enforced nations, wars... Woman has always played a role in reaction to the conflict released by patriarchal interests, she has played within a theatre that criticises and questions society, the system and history. Woman has not been the protagonist of the female dream.

For example, we could ask what has been the function of Electra, Antigone, Medea, Hecuba, Cassandra, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia and all the archetypal women belonging to classical theatre? They have been protagonists by reacting against the conflicts of the patriarchal system, as in history. But where are the key female roles that move in dreams other than those of this ordinary patriarchal reality?

The same process applies to the kind of apprenticeship for actors, theatre groups, companies, schools, in western or westernised civilisations (like Colombia). We must remember that it is only recently that women were allowed on stage, while in the millenary cultures that paid homage to the Great Mother Goddess the entire community participated in the healing and celebration rituals that were the origin of theatre. These first human beings lived in perfect harmony with nature and its divinities. Nevertheless we notice that female awareness is actually reawakening. The right part of our brain is activating, in men as in women, and we have many artists today.

This exaltation of natural energies liberates an enormous potential. The body of the performer can start to transform into a living

repository of sacred knowledge and memory; and art becomes the natural form for protection of knowledge, as it was originally.

The true actress/actor is the true woman/man who manages to join the three levels of her/his body harmoniously: the organic body, the body of the mind and the body of emotions.

In ancient times art was the Beholder-of-secrets. Wisdom was hidden in it as in a matrix. Actors, musicians, sculptors, painters, dancers, were wise repositories of knowledge. Nowadays the great majority of plays narrate stories in which the mythical and sacred dimensions are lost. Then the actors become empty puppets, histrionics who play roles in the mechanics of a play, without breaking or staining themselves, which is to say without participating in the secret wisdom and true knowledge.

This kind of actress/actor is also about to reconstitute herself/himself, be restored and reborn as a unity where all forces join in the trinity that compose her/him. They join in the *Daimon* that, according to Giordano Bruno, is the body, the place where everything is possible, in the "point of meeting of the infinite differences that can be found among beings". They manage to make their presence into One, visible, full, total in the feast, party, celebration or ceremony: in the Bio-drama.

A hidden wisdom exists, let us not castigate or break it any longer. Divinities inhabit this wisdom and thanks to it we are able to know who we are, where we come from and what we can call ourselves. We continue our

search to remember our Mother in dreams, myths and visions. And we close by saying with the Nahuatl from Mexico:

*Yellow flowers open their buds.*

*It is our Mother, the one with a masked face.*

*Your point of departure is Tamoanchán.*

*Yellow flowers are your flowers.*

*It is our Mother, the one with a masked face.*

*Your point of departure is Tamoanchán.*

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

BEATRIZ CAMARGO (Colombia) is an actor and director. After thirteen years as an actor with Teatro La Candelaria, in 1982 she founded Teatro Itinerante del Sol with Bernardo Rey. Her work explores the rural myths of South America and also specialises in creating huge ritual celebrations and street processions.