

# OPEN LETTERS

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Paris, 14.12.2003

*Dear Maggie and Julia,*

*now I have to admit I can't find time to write anything more for this issue of The Open Page! Believe me, I get up early and stay up late, and collapse only when I feel really exhausted in my bones. All for a thousand good reasons: many fantastic interesting workshops all with very different people and aims (about fifteen per week, with about twelve participants in each); performances to prepare with all too few rehearsals (what a beautiful word!) for shows here and there; a meeting where a woman turns into a volcano; meetings and meetings, with les élus représentants du peuple, non profit organisations, institutions, local partners in projects and plans like teachers, gardeners, neighbours, social workers, street educators, school directors, parents; administration, projects, decisions, demonstrations...*

*For the last ten years, I have had to deal with different issues. I was forced out of my shell in order to fight in the big bad little world around me - with the help of my great friends - for space, justice, work, money, recognition, health. Facing the danger of total dispersion, I struggle along with others for resources, coherence, physical and moral integrity, trying to resist exhaustion, physical and moral pollution, the invasion of bureaucratic obligations and absolute nonsense. I constantly have to learn and find agreement. Good luck is so necessary and unpredictable (luck is always welcome)!*

*It so happened that the talents I have had to develop for myself answered a huge need for more and more people affected by social handicaps, unemployment, violence, isolation, lack of housing, illness, ignorance, failure... For a while, my old belief in the creative meeting of cultural and social aims through art became a credo and a priority shared with a number of politicians and social workers. The services of the Politique de la Ville and a strong local non-profit network welcomed us - the eight members of the Ateliers du Chaudron - in our new very*

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*humble neighbourhood, the Quartier de Belleville Ménilmontant. Here, thanks to the practice of theatre and music, development in expression, communication, education and integration are fully understood.*

*Money never flows, but it allows me to work full-time on a low salary for several projects in our lively neighbourhood, where forty-two languages from all continents are spoken at the closest French school, between mosque, church, temple and synagogue. We opened theatre, voice and music workshops for people of all ages - from four to seventy-four - and in all conditions and at all levels, led by the artists of the company. Our new workshop space is opened freely for audiences of a maximum of fifty people at a time with public events, performances, concerts and exhibitions. Neighbours, kids and families are invited in order to facilitate exchange, links and sympathy.*

*Since 1999, we have also performed regularly all around the neighbourhood, on the boulevards, in gardens, at the food market, at street events and at several institutions and organisations. I love it. It is so real (the very opposite of a reality show!) when children, people, mothers and babies and even old men respond to our proposals and sometimes play with us on the spot. In a very short time, we have been accepted by this fantastically sensitive quartier.*

*I also keep on working regularly with feminists of the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes at the Maison des Femmes de Paris, directing women-only theatre workshops. It happens that a piece gets created and performed - what a gift!*

*So I am too full right now, and this has been going on for a few years already. Voilà, I'm so happy to hear from you. Send news, and let's keep in contact.*

*Love, Tanith*

TANITH NOBLE (France) began working with the Bread and Puppet Theatre in 1969. She started the company Ateliers du Chaudron at the Cartoucherie from 1972 to 1999, and then opened a new space in Ménilmontant (Paris). Puppeteer, actor and scenic composer, she organises, improvises, performs and directs workshops, projects and pieces with other artists and with many groups of very different people.

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Agiüimes, 31.12.2003

Dear Open Page,

*"My name is Rocío and I am thirty four years old. I was born in Ceuta, in the north of Africa, where I lived for the first five years of my life. I travelled continuously in the boats that cross the Gibraltar Straits, my dreams started there..." This is how my life started and how the text that defines my identity in the performance Las sin tierra: 7 attempted crossings of the Straits of Gibraltar started.*

*Can a performance define your identity?*

*Two or three years ago I felt a very strong wish, a vital need, to search for my roots, to dive into my most distant memories to find something that was hidden in the corners of my brain. The alternation of clear and precise recollections with periods of shadows without memory was becoming stronger.*

*I started working in theatre as a teenager and I never left the profession. I graduated in Drama, but never stopped studying and I graduated in other subjects like Psychology and Communication. This had something to do with not accepting limits. I didn't want to feel any physical or mental limits. I wanted to move further away and faster.*

*From when I was young I was lucky enough to find work in professional theatre companies and the craft taught me a lot. I learned quickly and I soon needed other challenges. For years commercial theatre maintained me in a comfortable economic life-style, but one day it stopped interesting me and it didn't give me anything anymore: I had become a mercenary actress.*

*I discovered other experiences which opened a window of knowledge and reflection to warm the soul in professional moments when I felt cold. I had the idea of working on an independent project and, although at the beginning I did not believe in my capabilities, the support of people close to me helped me aim higher. Once again I made the warrior woman start marching.*

*I fought and worked in an obsessive way as if life were running away from me. I chose the people with whom I wanted to work. Everything moved very fast. I searched for the financial means to achieve the project and organised never-ending meetings. The desire to carry the project forward was urgent, obsessive. I managed to obtain more than I had ever imagined, but the struggle kept on being external. I felt as if I were giving, giving and giving*

*all my energy. What was happening inside? In the performance my process was very personal and tied to the text at the beginning of this letter. I was diving into those shadows without memory.*

*To speak of other identities meant talking of my own. I had to confront memories, enter the shadows, go down the black well of my own recollections. I felt empty, without strength, breathless. I had to live through the pain I had experienced, that was part of my life each time I made the performance, remembering once and then again. During the performances, the boat in which I wrote about my real and changing life became a tattoo on my soul. I experienced looks of rejection and confrontation from the audiences, I wanted to run away. My vulnerability was total. On the inside I kept on struggling in order to not break down.*

*Then I stopped. I could no longer run. I was so tired, bloodless, exhausted. I thought about what meaning my struggle had. What was I fighting for? I was running so much, for what? I was giving away, for what? I was forgetting who I was and what I wanted. I had lost my identity, I was distant from everything and everyone.*

*I found some answers to these questions in the performance. One cannot be a nomad without loving a land, without giving a meaning to travelling, without knowing what really matters, without wishing someone would be waiting for you somewhere.*

*At the end I always wrote the same text in the boat, a subconscious wish: "I only want to have a place the colour of earth in which to plant the seeds of my dreams."*

*Now I have a small place the colour of earth in the south, on an island, surrounded by an immense blue ocean. I have a dream growing within me, a girl who will be called Africa, and for whom - now yes - I will continue to fight.*

Kisses, Rocío

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

ROCÍO SOLÍS (Spain) teaches at Malaga University. She is founder and president of the Asociación de Mujeres en la Artes Escénicas and artistic director of the devisers' international meeting Noctiluca. She has worked with various theatre companies in the south of Spain including Acuario Teatro and Espejo Negro. She is now living in the Canary Islands and collaborating with the University of Las Palmas.