



REPUBLIC OF LATVIA



# Doña Musica's Butterflies



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# ODIN TEATRET



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# **DOÑA MUSICA'S BUTTERFLIES**

with

**Julia Varley**

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*Doña Musica's Butterflies* is a performance about identity which the protagonist defines as a *tendency* to exist. It is the story of a character evaded from a performance - *Kaosmos* - that tells the story of her origins and narrates her adventures with arguments of theatre entomology, with theories of modern physics and with poems and tales from other times.

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Julia Varley

## FROM CATERPILLARS TO BUTTERFLIES Transformation and identity

*What  
the caterpillar  
calls  
the end of the world,  
the rest  
of the world  
calls a butterfly.  
(Lao Tzu, The Book of the Way and Virtue)*

Doña Musica sits in her armchair and tells stories as if she were a grandmother. Laid out on the table beside her are the objects she cares for most, the only ones necessary. Her story-telling was supposed to have been intimate; her voice should have drawn attention, seduced or aroused fear only by those small tone variations characteristic of fairy-tales. Doña Musica had not thought of doing a theatre performance, but her nature took advantage of her. The stories grew as her voice searched for listeners further away than the children sitting at her feet.

If I think back to my grand-parents and to my great-grandmother, I remember that their most fascinating stories were the ones about their past: where they had lived and with whom, their travels, their jobs, the roses in their gardens, their love affairs. I would have liked to have known more. So now Doña Musica tells about her past and comments it. But can a theatre performance narrate the birth and the development of a character that already is theatre? I still ask myself this question. But if *Doña Musica's Butterflies* is not a performance, what else is it, how else could it be called? From modern physics we learn that reality cannot be grasped, that once reality is defined it has already changed, and that the perception of reality is a consequence of the observer's point of view. The content of Doña Musica's narrative is more than ever related to each single spectator's interpretation - because many stories merge and because here even the form seems to defy a definite name.

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I have worked in theatre for a quarter of a century, but few are the characters I have represented, because Odin Teatret's productions can be performed up to 400 times. Among these characters are those who exist only for the production for

which they were created and those that continue to live independently from the context in which they were born. There are characters with whom I wanted to say something and characters who made me say what I did not know. There are characters that live with me only two or three years and others that have remained beside me now for twenty years.

The independent characters, those that refuse to die with their performance, take their destiny in hand and decide for themselves. They guide me towards situations, writings, performances that I - the actress - no longer determine. It is as if they have taken power.

Those who know my work have met Mr. Peanut, the character with the skull-head, that was born to do Odin Teatret's *Anabasis*. He started travelling the roads of the world and obliged me to make my first „solo“ performance *The Castle of Holstebro*. Now he has dressed up as a woman and is dancing in *Ode for Progress - A Ballet*. Perhaps because of jealousy towards Doña Musica and the time I dedicate to her, Mr. Peanut has managed to slip into the garden and among the butterflies that did not belong to him. He appears at the end, disguised, like an alter-ego of Doña Musica. Or maybe they are both just different aspects of the same person, who is, after all, me.

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In *Doña Musica's Butterflies* one of the threads of the story is the dialogue between the character, the actress and Julia. Identity is a difficult theme when roots intertwine more and more. Right now we witness the demand for recognition of small countries and of the rights of minorities, religious and ethnic wars and conferences on multiculturalism as daily bread and it is in this moment of confusion that identity is spoken of. I cannot be only one person. I recognise my roots which lead towards the stars and towards different continents and I live with different faces. Theatre allows me this life.

Another thread is modern physics and, in particular, some phrases from *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjov Capra. These difficult words, these abstract concepts, are once again a rather strange theme for a theatre performance. Maybe this is the reason that provokes Doña Musica into insisting on the spectators being confronted with such an elusive reality. The certainties of scientific research of the past have been substituted by the scientific doubt of today. It is now accepted that comprehension of reality can happen via intuition or dance, that experience defies definitions. History is now nourished by myth and science by art. A fascinating moment during rehearsals was when, while still using the same sentences in the rest of the text, the words „subatomic world“ were substituted with „the character“; everything suddenly seemed to be clear. It is difficult to understand and accept that reality is a tendency to exist, that it goes backwards and forwards in time, that it is composed of

waves and particles simultaneously. But that a character could have these qualities seems logical, at least to me who has worked in theatre for years.

The director has also found his place in the dialogue between the character, the actress and Julia. He is the one who manages to enhance that sense of humour that everyone recognises as mine. He is the external eye that decides what to cut away and corrects the timing, that does not forgive mistakes and is not understanding towards weaknesses, that tries to dilate the multiple meanings and strives to find new solutions. The director is present through the reconstruction of the process of creation of *Kaosmos* and he also appears as the hairy caterpillar who prefers not to become a butterfly. Even though Doña Musica makes fun of him and jokes about the misunderstandings between them, she is conscious that happiness comes exactly when the director forgets to look upon the work as something to correct and becomes just a visionary spectator.

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Not only atoms and subatomic particles, but also cells and complex systems exist in the scientific field. The study of the transformation of the caterpillar to chrysalis and of the chrysalis to butterfly belongs to that level of reality considered to be knowable. But that moment of transformation when

*one appears in two  
and two in one*

reveals another truth which is difficult to grasp. And it is this same transformation that Julia, the actress and the character would like to reveal by presenting that secret and private moment which does not belong to the stage, when the costume and make-up are taken off. The intention is precisely to enter that mysterious area giving up theatricality, action and play, to touch on the vulnerability of a butterfly that only has twenty-four hours of life.

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The theme of illusion is a vestige from the performance *Kaosmos*. Is what Doña Musica holds in her hand a handkerchief or a butterfly that flies? Is what Doña Musica represents real or a creation of the imagination? Both. If theatre still seduces it is not only because it establishes a relationship between living human beings, the actor and the spectator, but also because it presents at the same time reality and its representation. It becomes both experience and transcendence, both identification and distancing. Doña Musica really runs and really flies. Doña Musica sings and the song coming from the space around her envelops her. Doña Musica explains how to build a theatre character and reveals Julia who remembers how she

created the character. Doña Musica is sitting in an armchair and at the same time evokes life, death, old age, a new-born baby, an atom, a detail, chaos and a sea of darkness.

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That which was subtext in *Kaosmos* becomes text in *Doña Musica's Butterflies*. The Zen poems, pointed out to me by modern physics, which were starting points for Doña Musica's actions in *Kaosmos*, are now presented explicitly to the spectator. A hidden life is discovered, only to reveal more Chinese boxes, other mysteries.

*White butterfly  
a dart amongst carnations  
spirit of whom?*

I could say that the whole performance is contained in this poem. But if Doña Musica had not obliged me to work on *Doña Musica's Butterflies*, I would have never discovered the richness that concealed itself beneath these simple words. I am only sorry that the text's carnations, that I imagined red, decided to become simple white flowers in the performance.

Butterflies alight on flowers and flowers cover the lights. The circle is a magic world and the cloth covers the electric cables. Doña Musica lives in a garden and comes from outside to surprise the spectators. Doña Musica picks flowers in the world and arrives to the garden with her harvest. Mr. Peanut should continue to accompany me and the final image is death laughing and dancing with the blue butterfly pierced and framed. The blue butterfly comes from Brazil and it is precious because it only lives one day.

Now the butterflies, the flowers, the garden have another meaning. Doña Musica could be Death. Once again the „butterfly effect“ explains how small causes can have great effects. From the death of a performance, flowers, butterflies and a new performance are born. *Kaosmos* is no more and Doña Musica's butterflies dance in its place. The wig is taken off. The costume is soaked in sweat and Julia smiles at the fine butterflies of multi-coloured tissue-paper that invade the space.



Photo Rossella Viti



Photo Jan Rüsz



Photo Jan Rüsz



Photo Jan Rüsz



Photo Jan Rüsz



Photo Jan Rüsz

## DOÑA MUSICA'S BUTTERFLIES

### Text of the performance

#### I

I am Doña Musica. I am a character of a performance, *Kaosmos*. My name is inspired by a character of *Le Soulier de Satin* by Paul Claudel, a princess who whispered „who does not know how to speak, should sing!“ And this is my garden, I live here, amongst flowers and butterflies. White butterfly, a dart amongst flowers, spirit of whom?

How I was born? Did the actress give me life? Or did I, a character, reveal the actress? Did the actress mould her energy so as to transform it into Doña Musica? Or did I, Doña Musica, modulate the actress's energy? These questions won't lead us anywhere, because a character is a tendency, a tendency to exist, just like those particles that leap and dance in an atom. A character is something which lies in between the idea of an event and the event itself, a strange kind of physical being exactly half-way between possibility and reality.

In *Le Soulier de Satin* Claudel makes his Doña Musica say: „When words can only be used for dispute, why then not be aware that through chaos there is a sea of darkness at our disposal“. A sea of darkness ...

#### II

Each of you has a life tree or a flower, they are like other plants, but they have a heart-beat, listen to it.

The swarm of wings  
follows the perfume,  
never still and motionless,  
it flows and smiles,  
leaning on air.

Three curious butterflies asked themselves: what is fire? The first one flew around the flame, the second one was attracted by the light and frightened by the heat, the third one flew right into the heart of the flame and burnt. It knew what fire was, but was not able to explain it.

Where there is sea, there will be cornfields.

#### III

While the characters, the actors and the director were intent on the creation of the performance *Kaosmos*, my actress - Julia - was reading a book of scientific popularisation, *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjov Capra. She had underlined some passages which pointed towards the secret of what she wanted to do in the new production: infinity, to be and not be, flowing and changing, the shadow, what cannot be known and understood, the dance and the dancer who are one and the same. Julia was surprised by the wisdom of modern physics which seemed to rediscover the knowledge of ancient Asian philosophies. She wanted to translate these abstract concepts into the concrete behaviour of a theatre character, these abstract concepts which revealed truths that she was not able to grasp. Julia had underlined these sentences in the book: alteration, motion without rest, rising and sinking without a fixed law, it is only change that is at work here, it is like water in its movement, its peace is like a mirror, it follows and never leads.

#### IV

Listening to this melody I, Doña Musica, took my first steps. I discovered the movement of my arms, the postures of my body and the possible positions of my head. I understood where to place my weight and where to hide my strength. Accompanied by this music, my voice found the intonations for the reality of theatre fiction: when words can only be used for dispute, why then not be aware that through chaos there is a sea of darkness at our disposal. Those who do not know how to speak, should sing, yes! sing!

#### V

But the director was not satisfied. One day he would ask me to slow down, the next day to move even slower and the next to be faster. To please him I contrived to behave without it being possible to recognise the rhythm. If rhythm is given by the succession of beats, which is to say the slower or faster succession of intervals contained by a beginning and an end, my secret was to proceed without beginnings or endings. In this way also my actress put on stage that flowing and becoming of which she had read, applying the content of this sentence: in the world of an atom, matter does not exist with certainty at definite places, but rather shows tendencies to exist in given spots, and atomic events do not occur with certainty at definite times and definite ways, but rather show tendencies to occur.

A chrysalis ... awaiting the irrevocable hour of flight. The chrysalis dwells in the home of being no more and of still not being.

Chuang Tzu, the philosopher, had dreamt of becoming a butterfly. Or was it the butterfly that dreamt of becoming Chuang Tzu?

## VI

The director wanted at the end of the performance a room invaded by butterflies. The whole floor swarming with maggots that transformed themselves into butterflies filling the space with their fragile and multicoloured flight. Fragile? But butterflies have existed on earth longer than dinosaurs. They appeared, together with dinosaurs, more than 150 million years ago. And they still fly. While the gigantic beasts have been extinct for more than 65 million years. Some twenty thousand species of butterflies still exist. What kind of butterflies did the director want?

Did he want the Heidi-heidi? The Heidi-heidi always flies behind something. People can turn around as much as they like, but it will always be behind their back and that is why no-one has ever seen it. Or did the director want the Linguina Gomitulis whose long tongue unravels like a string, catching the fastest millipedes and giving them as presents to sparrows. Or did he want the Steamy-zigo-zago that spits smoke from its mouth and flies in a backward zigzag and gives out a whistle like the boiling water of a kettle, fifiú, fifiú, fifiú. Or did he want the Goofus-goofang that flies upside down and backwards because it does not care where it goes, but where it comes from. Or the Gilly-cubis-galoo that searches for flowers amongst the rocks of the Lunatic Canyon and lays square eggs, so as not to let them roll down the precipice. The children of Las Vegas would boil these eggs and use them as dice. Or the Nelson-Nelson that only has one wing and twirls like a spinning wheel. Its colour varies depending on the season and on the mood of the person who observes it.

But the director only wanted ordinary butterflies. I tried to become an ordinary butterfly. I started by becoming a caterpillar.

A hairy caterpillar, with many legs  
some scaly, with hooks, pointed  
others short, contractile, sticky  
to better crawl on the leaves  
like a gymnast, well attached.  
Ravenous is the caterpillar's mouth  
armed with sharp and firm jaws  
that cut in jerks and underneath them  
other small jaws munch the fibres  
and there, in between, is a hole  
that spins a fine silk strand.  
Caterpillars are the pilgrims of form.  
One day the velvet of their skin starts losing colour

the legs fix to the leaves with sugary slime,  
an unknown spasm torments them:  
to be another, to escape from oneself  
They swell up, they struggle, they contract,  
they arch the trembling body,  
they approach a trunk, a column, a wall  
and they climb up and there, at the top,  
they nail in the hooks of their rearmost legs  
and they let themselves go, upside down,  
like acrobats on a trapeze.  
An entire day they remain hanging,  
stock-still.  
And look! The body wrings and cleaves  
and a head rids itself of the old head,  
new legs sprout from the ancient legs  
and one appears in two and two in one  
The convulsive chrysalis quivers  
it unfolds itself slowly  
from the hairy corpse of the caterpillar  
that shrivels up and falls with a last tremor.

The fallen flower seems to return to its branch: a butterfly!  
A sneeze, the butterfly is no more.  
Lovers like butterflies, don't cry, even stars must say farewell.  
Summer, butterfly shadows sometimes skim the window.  
The flower explodes from a stone: a butterfly.  
The flower explodes from a stone: in this way a character is born.

## VII

When I, Doña Musica, a character, met the actress, I made myself known but not understood. Therefore the actress moved in opposite directions, she searched for contrasts and fled from easy solutions. The actress strove to find horrible details in beauty and fascinating sides to infamy. During this first phase her most frequent gesture was to shake her head. She shook her head like a tree in the wind so the fruit would fall and could be collected. Then the actress searched for the essence of the character, for the secret life of Doña Musica. Julia let me do what I wanted, how I wanted, when I wanted. She followed my whims, my oddities, without worrying about the director's comments or those of the other actors. It was a patient, slow, arduous process that resolved suddenly: the character had grown wings. So then the actress became the character, Doña Musica, capable of seeing herself from the out-



side and of remembering the uncertainties, the confusion and the harshness of the beginning. It was time for me, Doña Musica, to let myself be handed over to the spectators and tell this story. Once upon a time there was an obedient and sensitive child who loved butterflies. He ran after them and took them delicately in his small rosy chubby hands and then, gracefully, he would pull off their wings. One day his mother saw him and scolded him: „Aren't you ashamed, harming such a defenceless creature?“ And the child protested: „But butterflies like it“.

Even butterflies must earn their living.

### VIII

At a certain point in the process of creation of the performance Kaosmos the director told the actress that her role was the Doorkeeper. This Doorkeeper, in a novel by Franz Kafka, prevents a Man-from-the-country from being admitted to the Law. The director's briefing was for realistic scenes and an elderly character, while my actress was thinking of infinity, of how she could make a character similar to the sea gone with the sun. So the actress worked on the elderly character. Julia quickly wrote down her first associations: wrinkles, wisdom, sadness, slow steps, small steps, remembering the past, not remembering, without fear, teeth falling, the eyes don't see, longing for beauty, black teeth, rigid joints, life is disappearing, shrinking, Isak Dinesen, falling, suffocating, re-reading the same book, gangrene, colostomy-bag, amputation, deafness, shrivelled hands, longing for the sea, longing for a family, loneliness, end of the journey.

More about the elderly character: duckling lips and wide eyes, sealed lips and angry eyes, running and munching, laughing and irregular rhythms, a wavering shadow. A voice which faints, the voice of a cat, a voice with pointed lips. Hands of the elderly character: rubbing, stroking, the little finger faints, offering, opening a jar, dancing.

### IX

Where is life? In a butterfly? In a chrysalis? In a caterpillar? In the molecule of a caterpillar? In the cell of a caterpillar? In the smallest detail? In an atom? But in an atom there are particles destructible and indestructible at the same time, matter is both continuous and discontinuous, force and matter are but different aspects of the same phenomenon. Force and matter, particles and waves, motion and rest, existence and non-existence: these are just some of the opposite and contradictory concepts which are transcended in modern physics. But in modern physics then, there are no more laws!

### X

Before the law stands a Doorkeeper. To this Doorkeeper there comes a Man-

from-the-country and prays for admittance to the law. But the Doorkeeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment. The Man asks if he will be allowed in later. It is possible, says the Doorkeeper, but not at the moment.

The Man-from-the-country thinks the law should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone. But having taken a better look at the Doorkeeper, he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter. The Doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit at one side of the door. There he sits for days and months and years waiting to be admitted to the law.

The Man-from-the-country makes many attempts to be admitted to the law. The Man sacrifices everything, however valuable, to bribe the Doorkeeper. The Doorkeeper accepts everything but always with the remark: I am only taking it to keep you from thinking you have omitted anything.

During these many years the Man fixes his attention almost continuously on the Doorkeeper. He curses his bad luck, in his early years loudly and boldly. Later, as he grows old, he only grumbles to himself. He becomes childish. Now he has not very long to live. At the end he asks: everyone tends towards the law, why is it that during all these years no-one else has asked to be admitted? And the Doorkeeper answers: no-one else could ever be admitted here since this door was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.

Each of you has a life tree or a flower ...  
The butterfly knows, the butterfly dreams,  
the flower springs out from the weeds.  
White butterfly amongst the corn,  
out of a worm a spirit was born.  
White butterfly amongst the corn,  
summer has come as a storm.

You came to my door and knocked.  
I asked: who is it? You answered: it is me!  
And the door was not opened.  
Time went by, you returned and knocked at my door.  
I asked: who is it? You answered: it is me!  
And the door remained closed.  
More time went by and again you knocked at my door.  
I asked: who is it? You answered: it is you!  
And the door was opened.

Each of you has a life tree or a flower, they are like other plants, but they have a heart-beat, listen to it.

Time lies on the gutter, a sparrow sings, pecking at times.  
I can hear ancient music amongst pine-trees, see clouds a thousand miles away.  
The garden has filled with the sound of crickets.  
Well on in years, mountains are more beautiful than ever.  
I am happy, whatever happens, I am here.

## XI

The director had said to the actress: I would like you to do a very old character. Julia bought the wig and found in her father's attic a night-dress in black silk and a silver embroidered Arab cape. One day she got dressed and made her face up with grey and white to surprise the director. She wanted him to see his grandmother again with her long loose white hair, that image of little girl and old lady that he had described in his book *The Paper Canoe*.

The costume - from the consistency of the clothes to the hair-do, from the shoes to the jewellery - is one of the character's most evident tendencies, something which transforms and is transformed. So I worked on the costume: dark veils and lace, coloured embroideries to adorn the black silk, a pair of high-heeled shoes covered in cloth as if they were the bound feet of a Chinese woman, a costume which would make me tall and thin like Kazuo Ohno's Argentina.

But all the words we use to describe experience are limited, they are not features of reality, but creations of the mind, parts of the map, not of the territory. In modern physics the universe is seen as a dynamic, inseparable whole. The infinitesimal atom and the whole universe are engaged in endless motion and activity, in a continual cosmic dance of energy.

In narrating I have used the first person: I am Doña Musica - and I am not. I am the actress - and I am not. I am Julia - and I am not. I am and am not. I go forwards and backwards in time, just like those particles which leap and dance in an atom. In *Le Soulier de Satin* Claudel makes his Doña Musica say: through chaos there is a sea of darkness at our disposal. Chaos is the art of building complexity starting from simple elements. Chaos creates forms, information and order, a hidden, mysterious, paradoxical, unforeseeable but undeniable order, which obliges us to see again. In chaos a small cause can have great consequences. It is called the butterfly effect: the wing beat of a butterfly in Japan can provoke a hurricane in Denmark. Or as the poet had already disclosed: wind in the west and fallen leaves are gathered in the east.

*Où sont les papillons d'antan?* What happened to last summer's butterflies?

Eugenio Barba

## ALL THEATRE IS MADE OF DANCE

In certain manifestations of African culture and its Caribbean and American diaspora, the gods are made of the substance of dance. We can't simply say that the gods dance. The dances are the subtle matter, on the border of the material and the immaterial world, through which the power of the gods is represented. Dance is the vehicle that brings human beings close to the gods.

Theatre, too, is made of the substance of dance.

Jacques Copeau, who together with Stanislavski was one of the inspirations for the renewal of theatre in our century, affirmed that dance is the essence of drama.

### *Dance Without Music*

There are distinctions which are like wounds. Such is the one splitting the territory of the performing arts, separating with rigid borders dance from theatre. This wound is a product of European conventions of the last centuries. In most of theatre history and in the reality of experience, such a rigid distinction does not exist. It didn't exist in ancient Greek and Roman theatre, on the Elizabethan stage and in the Commedia dell'Arte, nor does it exist in the classical forms of Asian theatre, or in the practice of those actors who know they are dancing even if they conceal it beneath an interpretation which has nothing to do with the genre „dance“.

Nor is dance „naturally“ dependent on music. In the last page of an anonymous book published in Italy about four centuries ago, a mental experiment was proposed in order to demonstrate the diabolic character of dance. The book was a ferocious pamphlet against carnivals by a man terrorised by the idea of disorder (*Discorso contro il Carnevale*, 1607). The author suggested that one should look at a roomful of men and women dancing, and pretend not to hear the music. One can then observe the artificial movements, note the contortions people make as they touch each other, take each other by the hand, lean towards each other, search for each other, lose each other. They don't look like civilised men and women. They are grotesque, jerky, affected or obscene. One might think they are mad. Unbeknownst to themselves, they are in the hands of the devil.

I think this is an excellent exercise for directors and actors. If, when we switch off the music, dance only gives rise to forced, exaggerated or jerky movements, it means that it is not springing organically *from* the body, but is an attempt to impose mechanically the music *on* the body. When dance is organic, it contains its own music. It does not matter whether the music is silent or provided from the outside for the enjoyment of the spectator.

Performers trained in a classical Asian tradition can dance without music and their action doesn't lose its organicity; it is not less attractive to the spectator. Add music, singing, the poetry of words and the fantasy of narration, and the performance becomes richer and more complete. But even without all this, presented in its nakedness, the action retains its force and life.

This applies not only to performers from the classical Asian theatres. The mimes from the Decroux school, the Odin Teatret actors, and ballet dancers who are accustomed to music even during their training, know how to dance without a melodic accompaniment, following the inner organic music of their own physical actions. The same ability characterises all those who struggle for a scenic presence through the training of precise physical actions. Stanislavski explained how actors could compose their own dance, working on the character and the situations suggested by a text.

Film allows us to see this skilful, silent dancing in the biomechanical exercises of Meyerhold's actors or the training of Rena Mirecka and Ryszard Cieslak from Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory.

In addition to the rhythm of song, of a musical instrument, or a drum, there is a dynamo-rhythm constituting the music of the body. In all these examples we don't observe the genre „dance“, but the dance of the body-in-life. The word „life“ is not used gratuitously. It indicates that elementary level of performative behaviour which does not mean anything, but is pure and simple *presence*. It is neither expression nor communication, but it is what makes both possible. It is the shared ground of actors/dancers; it is their pre-expressive level.

### *Falsity and Fiction*

Theatre and dance form one single vast territory. This can be explored both from the viewpoint of the geographer interested in neighbourhoods, contiguous zones and mixed panoramas, as well as from that of the geologist wanting to explore the underground layers common to regions which, on the surface, are divided and different.

It is the geologist's approach that attracts me. I am interested in the deep dance, hidden in all performers when their presence is efficient. I try to discover the waves of a rhythm or of a powerful action which is retained in the depths of the body even if it barely moves, or behaves „normally“.

When actors retain the energies that infuse life into their scenic presence, when they do not dance overtly, something dances *within them*. Without this deep dance, there is no efficient actor. There would be only falsity; we would lack true *fiction*.

In theatre, the opposite of falsity is fiction; i.e. art.

Whatever acting style an actor chooses, realistic or not, it is necessary that every action is *real*. An actor must *act the fiction* and not *pretend to act*. An action

is real only when the slightest movements are rooted in the torso, involving the whole body, and not in a part of it, such as the hands, the eyes or the mouth. This integrity that springs from the body-mind, this unity of the organism-in-life, is what I call „dance“. When the hidden dance becomes explicit and develops itself freely in space, then it becomes dance, also according to the conventions of performance genres. Then words and silence may be no longer sufficient, and rhythm, drums, and music are required to create a dialogue.

As a spectator, I live a particular experience every time I observe an actor who knows how to reach down to the sources of scenic life. It doesn't matter whether it is a comedy, a tragedy or a sad drama with no hope, where the truth of our meaningless destiny is revealed in all its icy sterility. As soon as my attention moves towards the actor's body, then life triumphs. When I release myself from the grip of words and plot, facial mimicry, hand gestures, and concentrate on observing the actor's torso and feet, I can see the dance hidden beneath the veneer of acting. The subterranean dragon of life surfaces, revealing its symptoms even when they are barely perceptible. Sometimes its presence emerges in an explosive way and then, with or without music, we all recognise that theatre is made of dance.

The memory of past centuries hands down to us similar images. At the end of the darkest and most ferocious plays, after reducing to ashes the illusions of the optimistic spectators, after revealing the bestiality that lurks beneath the noble words of knights and the great ones of this world, after showing how love can be a bitter struggle, Shakespeare's actors suddenly abandoned the fiction of their character and began to dance to the lively music of a jig. Then maybe one of the spectators might suddenly realise that the actors, despite all appearances, had been dancing all through the play.

Translation: David Korish



Photo Jan Rütz