

Foreword: Theatre for Justice

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"Ella [la utopía] está en el horizonte," dice Fernando Birri. Me acerco dos pasos, ella se aleja dos pasos. Camino diez pasos y el horizonte se corre diez pasos más allá. Por mucho que yo camine, nunca la alcanzaré. ¿Para qué sirve la utopía? Para eso sirve: para caminar. (Galeano 310)

"Utopia is in the horizon," Fernando Birri says. I move two steps towards it, she walks away two steps. I walk ten steps and the horizon moves ten steps further away. For as much as I walk, I'll never reach it. What is utopia good for? Precisely for that, to keep us walking. (my trans.)

Justice.

Theatre.

What is justice?

Is there a way to achieve it?

Just as utopia is always out of reach, so too is justice. Still, I like to think that justice and utopia are reachable. I don't think I will actually see it happen, on a global scale, but I do what I can as an individual, as an actor, and as a director.

Is theatre a tool in the path towards justice?

It awakes consciousness: through emotions (empathy, laughter, terror); through intellect, an invitation to insight, thoughts about specific ideas and situations; and through action.

Theatre reflects reality. This we all know; it has been told to me ever since I first stepped into drama school ... I have, now, had the opportunity to corroborate that. It shows our particular perspective, no one else has it. Some may share a few ideas, some may seem very much alike, but no one will have the same eye, the same aesthetic approach. Since through art we are able to find a voice for ourselves, we want to make sure of what it is that we want to say, and how. It is in art where we

have a bubble of freedom, absolute freedom. In life we are attached to so many things and ways that it is hard to follow our desires, to stay true to ourselves. We are bound to so many duties and “needs” (I use quotation marks because, for the most part, these are created, or are constructions and manipulations of this world we live in). I have to pay rent; I need to have a big apartment, in an expensive area; I need to have a dog, I need to have a family; I have to stay married, for the children, even if it hurts; I have to stay connected; I need the latest phone; I need the biggest and brightest TV; I need the most comfortable, fast, state of the art, flashiest car. I have to take care of my elderly, ill father, I have to ... I need to ... whatever. Each one of us knows our personal boundaries and “obligations.” In art, there is no other obligation than to stay true to oneself.

When we are searching for rewards other than the pursuit of our own truth, the art we create feels like it is lacking something. If we begin our artistic creation looking for recognition, or for money, or to replicate another piece (our own or someone else’s), or searching for specific reactions/emotions for a specific end, then our creation is compromised. It’s like beginning a conversation that is meant to be honest with someone else’s speech, saying it’s ours, or trying to be earnest through manipulation. I’m not saying such a creation can’t be beautiful or functional but it will not be truthful. My question is then: if art (theatre in my case) is a place for exploring my deepest desires, fears, thoughts ... my deepest me, why wouldn’t I explore that, instead of creating without looking inwards? Why wouldn’t I choose a path without ties or boundaries for my creation? Even if sometimes this requires effort, it is worth it. Even if sometimes I get off track (because I need the job, I have to show I’m great, I want people to like it ...), coming back to truth is essential to art, as Paula Bonet explains:

El arte es el lugar en el que se hacen preguntas y se intentan encontrar respuestas. Es donde debería haber más libertad para poder denunciar y alzar la voz. Es una herramienta de comunicación que funciona, creo que tenemos que hacer uso de ella. (Bonet qtd. in Sánchez Seoane)

Art is the place where questions are asked, and where we try to find answers. It is where there should be more freedom to accuse and raise one’s voice. It is a tool for communication that works and I believe we have to use it. (my trans.)

It is inevitable to be more myself once I know myself. When I have explored what is in my head, what I believe, what I’m comfortable with, and what I don’t like, then I tend to be more congruent. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to not be a model of the theatre I stage. I create theatre

and theatre creates me in return. The person I am will be an agent of change; how I treat people, what kind of example I set, how I react to the people around me ... If one person can make a change with his or her behaviour day by day, what kind of change or influence can be achieved by something that is meant to have an audience?

I believe in the idea that art is subversive, for it is an expression of freedom. To be free in a world like ours is in itself a rebellious act. And creating, performing, and teaching are responsibilities we should embrace, for they will show others the path to freedom. Theatre inspires and shows others the possibility of creation in themselves. As Joseph Beuys said, "every man is an artist," and he believed that we all have the creative capacity for autodetermination, while also supporting the idea that true capital was not money, but creativity (qtd. in Gutiérrez Galindo 100). Theatre (art) invites spectators to create, to be agents of action (to determine themselves and their surrounding); theatre invites people to be free.

Whatever I do has an impact in society, micro or macro. Paula Bonet has said, "Creo que todo – absolutamente todo – es político: lo personal es político, cada decisión y acto lo son. Incluso decidir no actuar es un acto político [Everything – absolutely everything – is political: The private is political, each choice and each action are political. Even the decision of not acting is a political act]" (qtd. in Sánchez Seoane; my trans.). Following this line, there is no way a play wouldn't be political. Even choosing to make a non-political play is itself a political decision.

If the audience doesn't find direct meaning in what they see, they tend to search for it ... and eventually they will find it. People will try to make sense out of art. It is not a matter of what is right and what is wrong. In art there are no wrongs. It is a matter of what you are saying. What speech do you want to deliver? How specific or how open to interpretations do you want it to be? Just be aware. Anything you do is open to interpretations.

And again ... everything you do is political. What kind of world am I helping to create? As Galeano said about utopia, you have to keep walking the walk. Maybe raising my voice will not change everything, but I'm certain that someone will listen, and maybe, then he or she will raise another voice ... and so on and so forth. Theatre is my megaphone, my place, from where I try to make my voice reach further.

When engaging in an artistic endeavour always think: What kind of society am I procuring? What am I criticizing? What kind of ideas do I want my audience to wonder about? What do I want – or not – from my play? These questions are also applicable to me, as a family member ... as a professional ... as an individual ... as someone who has an active part in a society. As someone who wants justice to be achieved, even if not in my lifetime.

