

Cristina Lastra

## What Have You Been Doing, Dear?

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6.45 am: the alarm clock rings. I get up. I take a long, deep breath. I wake the youngest of my three daughters. We take a nourishing breakfast, you know, muesli, toast, diet cheese, orange juice, coffee, milk and honey is sweet and so are you ... "Hurry up, dear, or you'll be late for school". Who said maids are easy to get in Latin America? Come on, you read too many novels! So up and doing! It is 8.45 a.m. and I am alone. I take a look at the plants that grow on the patio of the house I could afford to buy after a theatre success nine years ago. I till the soil of my small family orchard and add an organic-fertiliser to it. Eugenio Barba is right: the roots are closer together than the branches. This can be applied to people from different countries, to languages, to artistic expressions, to women's issues. The marjoram and the daffodils are very green and yellow and healthy. I clean the house while I do a sense memory exercise, do the shopping, I study personal behaviours, prepare lunch, and - why not? - dinner. I love cooking, it makes me feel like a modern alchemist, a sorceress. Do my children know how much love there is in a simple plate of mashed potatoes? Go to the bank to pay taxes. So expensive in Argentina! Yoga class, at home. Study the scene between Richard III and Anne, for my theatre training classes. Lunch time ... eating in a hungry world ... shouldn't we kneel down and give thanks to whatever we may believe in? A sense of the Sacred ... that's what the so called "commercial theatre" has lost: the element of a sacred ritual performed by human beings, for human beings, a revealing act, in the sense of drawing the veils, *revelare* in Latin. As Michel Cournot put it: "A few hours of responsible life stolen from the illusion of daily life". Give myself a little time for a chat with the girls, my daughters are building up their road to salvation or to hell! So, babies, here is Ma! Lecture at the University: *Actress and playwright: a personal experience*. After the lecture, suddenly, I don't know why, a question: why "him and me" instead of "he and I"? When I was a very little girl the English speaking parents of some friends of mine used to say "he and I", then it turned into "he and me" and now it is "him and me". So, two Subject Pronouns have turned into two Object Pronouns... what does this mean? We

were Subjects, at least we believed we were the owners of ourselves, what happened? Who owns us now? Who are the Subjects to whom we are merely Objects? What monopoly, what force, what subject has had the power to convince us we are passive objects of a life we don't determine, we don't choose. And this happens in the English language, not yet in Spanish! Is there a hope in Latin America after all?!

Rehearsal: *The Seagull* by Chekhov ... Who can catch the trembling of a flying bird? Phone Mum. How are you, Uncle Julius? Do you feel better now? How is your choreography for Julio Bocca coming on, brother Rudolph? Don't you think we've got to meet this weekend to talk about the plot? I have found the programme when you danced with Rudolph Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn playing the role of Paris at the London Festival Ballet ... You are not making a living as a dancer now, but you'll

always be dancing every minute of your life. Nothing and nobody can take your soul away ... A phone call, no I won't work on television unless I can do it under other circumstances, but thank you anyway, see you. Reading time. Then a little bit of meditation. Supper. I'm not tired, but I need a good sleep. I would like to know more about the life of other actresses all around the world ... I go to bed ... What have you been doing, dear? Good night!

CRISTINA LASTRA (Argentina) is an actress, teacher and writer. After 20 years as an actress she turned to writing and became the first winner of the Rosa Guerra award for her play *Sobre palabras y abrazos*.



Eleonora Duse at home. Photo: Fondazione Primoli