

Ely Schulz

Who Is to Blame? The Pig or the One who Feeds it?

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I will approach the theme of the "teaching-learning" process from the point of view of someone who has devoted herself for twelve years exclusively to theatre in a regional group of Latin America. I do not find significant arguments to differentiate between male and female. I think that theatre transcends gender.

Teatro Luna, the group in which I work, has just gone through a hard time of internal restructuring. We had some economic problems and so we considered the possibility of passing on knowledge as a means of making money; that is, we planned to give workshops, announce seminars, offer courses, organise meetings and festivals, open academies and so on. Complications arose when doubts, embarrassment and uncertainties seized us and we decided to use our own experience as pupils/apprentices as a reference. When I entered Teatro Luna's Academy as a pupil/apprentice twelve years ago, I was asked to pay 500 Chilean pesos, about one US dollar in present value. Recently I have participated in workshops, courses, meetings and festivals and I notice that the demands for remuneration are very high. As a consequence of this experience, we decided to confront the following themes and questions.

THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Did the pupils' interest in learning diminish or did the teachers' motivation to educate change first?

There is a saying in Chile: "Who is to blame? The pig or the one who feeds it?" I think that teachers have allowed their economic needs to influence the character of the process of the passing on of knowledge. The pupils have perceived this and consequently it has conditioned their interest in learning and their relationship to a particular teacher, which is to say their affection and respect for him or her.

Do teachers really recognise the true and specific reasons that drive them to teach? Most of the time, the self-justification that soothes conscience prevents us from recog-

nising with sincerity the real reasons that motivate us to coach. If these turn out to be shameful or painful to us, then we simply avoid admitting them to ourselves.

What is the teacher's responsibility? First of all, it is to treat the pupil as a "subject" and not as an "object" or "potential buyer" of a "product". If teachers succeed in being faithful to this premise during the whole process of the passing on of knowledge, teachers will be responsible both towards themselves and the pupils.

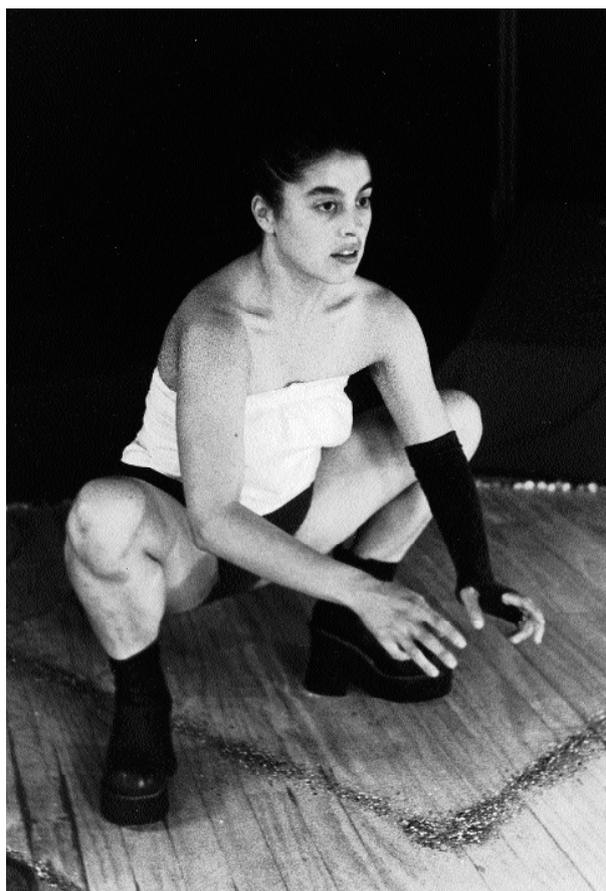
THE TEACHER'S BETRAYAL

Is it ethically justified that a pupil should pay a teacher? If one of the teachers' aims is financial remuneration, they must solve the question of how and where funds can be obtained. Money cannot pass directly from the pupil's to the teacher's hands. An institution or a public office must be found to engage in the funding of the process of the passing on of knowledge. Affection and respect are implicit in the teacher-pupil relationship and if these attributes are quantifiable in money, the relationship between teacher and pupil becomes corrupted.

Does the desperate need to survive and keep oneself active justify privileging the sale of knowledge over the most important aim of theatre, performing? We cannot expect to keep ourselves alive as a theatre group by announcing and realising workshops and seminars with the only aim of earning money and as a form of subsistence. Sooner or later the primary necessity and aim that brought us together to create a theatre group will emerge: the need to perform for an audience. If we do not satisfy this necessity, we will disappear.

THE PUPIL/APPRENTICE'S FREEDOM

Up to what point are pupil/apprentices free to opt for their learning context, if they are not familiar with the different alternatives at



Ely Schulz in *El camino de la garza*.
Photo: Raúl Torres

the moment of choice? It is not fair that only after having given out a certain amount of money to different learning sources, pupils can make themselves a more or less clear image of the possibilities and feel free to choose their own way.

Do the pupils have the courage to go beyond the feeling of awe they have for the teachers and confront them? Personally, I think that two big groups of pupils exist: those who really have the courage to find and follow their own path, assuming all the risks implied, and those who remain eternal copies of their teachers. The latter stay dependent on the teacher and are incapable of confrontation, often for the fear of losing convenient company and support.

Do pupils exist who are willing to go

beyond themselves, so as to find and follow their own way? They do, but they are very few. The reality of the survival of these groups and/or individuals is daily discomfort and insecurity, but it is rewarded by much more satisfaction.

THE PERSONIFYING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER AND PUPIL

What is personifying? In my experience, the workshops, seminars, festivals, pedagogical meetings and other events that try to transmit knowledge, have turned into an occasion for old theatre groups to gather young groups or individuals, because their participation generates an income. On the other hand, during these events it is expected that the pupils should assimilate a series of concepts, that in a real teacher-pupil/apprentice relationship would take almost a lifetime to acquire. There is no doubt that absolutely no personifying is possible in these conditions.

If we decide to teach, we should be faithful to a fundamental principle from the beginning: the pupil should be treated as and made to feel a *subject* and not an object or potential buyer belonging to a consumers' sector of our product. I think that the secret of personifying is rooted in this idea.

Conscious of these reflections, Teatro Luna decided to form an Academy for young people. In effect, we succeeded in obtaining public body (the Town Cultural Centre of Valdivia) finance of part of the teaching of the pupil/apprentices while Teatro Luna

itself funds the other part. Each student will pay the transport (four US dollars per month) to and from the Teatro Luna's space, which is situated out of town.

In this way we try to free the teacher-pupil's relationship from the monetary transaction, so that it can concentrate exclusively on the passing on of knowledge without altering the affection and respect, the duties and obligations.

In my experience, I believe that each group and/or individual in a teaching or learning situation, has to recognise the true and specific reasons that motivate them, and to keep in mind that there are ethical principles to observe. The teacher cannot permit the relationship with the pupil/ apprentice to be affected by a monetary transaction, where the teacher offers a product to a potential buyer and the pupil/ apprentice buys a product from a potential seller.

Translated from Spanish by Maria Ficara

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