

Petra Lindblom

Myth of the Spider-Woman

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accompanied by a drum-beat,
the sound of a rattle,
a musical bow, a didgeridoo or,
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The journey should always
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or something.*

AUTUMN 1985

After school, I wanted to go in search of adventure and I moved to Milan where I started a course with a theatre group of which I had heard. They spoke of Antonin Artaud and the "Method" from the Actors Studio in New York. It sounded like the challenge I was longing for. The exercises were terribly serious and the border between reality and theatre vanished more and more for me. Once, I actually sent a telegram to a friend in France, saying I was to arrive on the night train, just to make my improvisation more authentic and the fiction stronger.

Soon everything became chaos and a sea of sorrow and pent up feelings burst out from the pursuit of profound motives and true sensations. I was happy to discover my wounds because they were proof that my soul existed, but something was completely wrong. I felt weaker and weaker and the continual depression was like a drug, as I constantly reopened the wound that wanted to heal. I fell to pieces and broke down, revealing painful truths, as I floated around in a tearful drama.

The only glint of light was that paintings, music, theatre and dance would speak directly to my despairing heart so intensely that I felt at the border of mystical experiences. But a feeling of emptiness threatened to short circuit me. I started to stumble, even if in some mad part of me a twinkle of triumph would say: "See what an excellent actress I am. I deceive everyone including myself!" Whoops!

The work which I thought related to theatre, became a journey to dark corners, difficult relationships, confusion and pain. Certainly I did not return home a better actress - quite the opposite - but I had achieved a broader perspective and an enormous desire to learn.

THE CUEVANO

In spring 1991, I was in Spain working with three other actors. We lived in Vega de Pas, in the mountains, where the Pasiegos live, a nomadic people who move their living quar-

ters up to twenty times a year following their cows. They carry all their belongings in a big basket on their back called the *cuevano*. This basket is used for everything: children, pots, food, water, clothes, straw and hay. Everybody carries one or more of these baskets.

We carried our water from the village forty minutes walk down the valley in a *cuevano*. The landscape was very green. It often rains there. A gentle drizzle caressed us when at dawn we made our way in silence down the valley to our working space in the school. We let ourselves be influenced by the traditions of the Pasiegos in our work. I chose a *cuevano* and some cowbells as props, and I set the words from a poem about the Pasiegos to a *jojk*, that is the special way of singing of the Sami people. A *jojk* does not have a beginning or an end, but is part of eternity, like the mountains and the sea.

My father's family is from the Sami country, where the Samer, the indigenous people from the north of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, live. I have always wanted to get to know the Sami culture.

LIFE MAKES ART

Later in life, I sweated, lived and travelled for five years with Teatret Om, an Italian theatre group based in Denmark. Even though the collective work really meant a lot to me, love for a man forced me to leave and move back to my own country. My heart tells me that this is the right choice and reminds me of the words of an actress friend I like very much: "Let life make art, not art make your life".

With a husband and child, physical travel is not without problems. So instead of travelling, the first year I worked with people who have come from far away; from Iraq, Iran, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia, Somalia, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. They are refugees and the children of refu-

gees. I try to get them to tell their stories. I tell mine, and I sing and play a performance in their classroom.

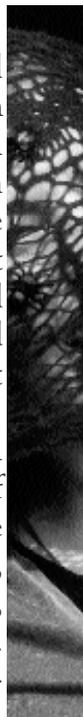
I base my whole project on the myth of the Spider-Woman who weaves everybody and everything together in her big spider web. The Spider-Woman says that all living beings need to belong somewhere. If we lose the connection, we lose the meaning of our lives. I let the children paint big body shapes which they fill with their own stories, with all that they have experienced. They listen and tell, giggle and get frightened. At times it is hard, but our stories, laughter and tears, weave us together.

SHAMANISM

With shamanistic practice I felt that I returned home as a member of the universe. It gave me a physical sensation of belonging that is hard to describe in words. In shamanism travel is not fantasy, but a journey to another reality - a non-ordinary reality just as authentic and true as the ordinary one, only at another level.

Travel is at the base of shamanism and in it I found an invisible bridge between art and my daily life. I had to let go of the fear of the unknown and let myself into the tunnel. The journey can be accompanied by a drum-beat, the sound of a rattle, a musical bow, a didgeridoo or, as in the old Nordic tradition of Sejd, by a song. The journey should always have an aim: to obtain help, guidance, power, healing for somebody or something. It is an important guiding principle in order not to fall in love with the images and get lost. The shift of consciousness is not a goal in itself, but a door, a hole in the earth to reach down to the power at the source.

Theatre took me on a journey in life, and life took me on a journey where theatre became the tool with which to accept life and a way to learn how to work with my



energy, with my body as an instrument. Through theatre I met shamanism, which has given me a platform to stand on, and a reliable ethic and meaning in my creative work. At the same time shamanism has shown me a humble and fearless path into the forest, into darkness, and a way in which to co-operate with big and small powers without getting crushed. Everything is connected and this way I can continue travelling with my son, my man, theatre, art and music, as in the text dedicated to the Pasiego in my *jojk*.

*Y eternamente marchando
y andando de continuo
ira siempre caminando sin hallar descanso
andando sin terminar su camino*

(And eternally walking
and continually moving
always going on without a rest
moving never ending the path)

Translated from Swedish by Julia Varley

PETRA LINDBLÖM (Sweden) studied with the Comuna Baires in Italy, the Nordic Theatre School in Denmark, and with Carlos Cueva of Cuatrotablas in Peru. She collaborates with the Natasha Project, a network of actors and directors. After joining Galeria Group in Denmark, Teater Albatross in Sweden and Teatret Om in Denmark, she is now a solo performer and pedagogue in collaboration with Theatre Dagaz in Sweden. Petra also sings with the Danish Bulgarian Choir, Usmifka.