

Roberta Carreri

A Handful of Characters

For months I work on the performance without knowing who my character is, who is performing my actions, who is singing the songs I sing. At every opportunity Eugenio tells me: "What you're doing is too much like Judith", referring to the character of my solo performance. Interpreting the same character for so many years has rooted its physical dynamics in me. They've become second nature now, and threaten to colour everything I do on stage.

I turn to look back and I see a small procession of characters observing me. I am an actress. Creating characters and keeping them alive has been my profession for twenty-five years.

As with all births, the creation of a new character is a small miracle every time. For me, creating a character is somewhat similar to putting my thoughts down on paper, delaying their escape long enough to transform them into words. It requires time. To create a character is indeed to "form" it. The flow of work and of thought must be slowed down and you must make choices, turn down a myriad of possibilities and concentrate on a single detail. It means saying no. But saying "no" hurts. It eliminates and limits, it constrains and obliges. It defines. "No" puts an end to one phase of the adventure and opens another.

When spectators watch my work, they see a character in action.

The "character" is an effect, an effect designed to give the impression that one is dealing with someone or something resembling a person. This "impression", however, is embodied in the space existing between actor and spectator: at times more towards the former, at times more towards the latter, on some rare occasions exactly between the two, with many nuances. It would be interesting to be able to determine precisely at what point in this space the "character" effect condenses. Some characters were characters for the spectator but not for me. Others are characters both for me and for the spectator. Still others will always remain characters for me even though the spectator cannot recognise them or be as familiar with them as I am.

It is not possible to reason as though the "character" were an entity in itself, a fully-fledged personality, one you interpret, incarnate and understand, one you are faithful to or betray. Nor is this possible when the character already exists, created by an author in a novel or a play, or passed down through history.

The characters to which I have given form did not exist for me *a priori*. The costumes I chose and created for them

have never been connected to historical reality. The costume has always served as clothing for the spirit more than for the body. Antigone wears the garments of a Brazilian *Mae de Santo* (a combination of a wedding dress and the habit of a priestess); Judith dons a long night-gown of white silk; Cassandra wears a modern evening dress with sequins. I could say that in choosing the costume I choose how to "illustrate" the character.

Some characters are born from a book, others from a gesture, still others from a pair of shoes, from a hat or from a garment: I put them on, and they transmit to me the desire to move in a particular way.

Some of "my" characters are mythical (Judith, Antigone, Cassandra), others are types or, rather, prototypes (the Free and Untamed Indian Woman, the Civilised Savage, the Mother Who Has Lost Her Child, the *Mae de Santo*); still others are figures that have already been singled out and characterised by a writer (Bertolt Brecht's Polly Peachum and Yvette Pottier, or Boris Vian's Dennis the Wolf).

There are innumerable types of characters, and countless ways of giving them consistency and credibility. For this reason, rather than speak about the character, I would prefer to talk about a "handful of characters".

My first performance with Odin Teatret was *The Book of Dances* in 1974 in Carpignano Salentino, in Italy.

Everything I did in *The Book of Dances* I discovered under the patient guidance of Eugenio Barba. The performance was based on dances that emerged from our daily training with props. Having just arrived in the group, I had not yet had the possibility of developing my own training. In Salento's stifling summer heat, Eugenio would spend hours inculcating me with the principles of actions using props, in the aim of creating a

dramatic dance. But, to me, the dramatic thing was the situation itself. I was struggling to survive. My body was a stranger to me and yet I had to seem at ease in it while performing.

In *The Book of Dances* I was not consciously working with a character: I was Roberta, dressed in a particular manner, playing music and dancing in a way I had never done before. Like most of my companions, I also worked barefoot; I, who had spent my whole life hiding my feet in shoes. This in itself was out of the ordinary. I also did the physical training barefoot, and this daily work contributed to developing the expressiveness of my feet.

In the programme of the performance no character names appeared near the actors' names. Eugenio Barba could very well have placed one there, however. Perhaps the only one who might have had a character in mind was Torgeir Wethal, who had been working on Pär Lagerkvist's *The Dwarf*. But certainly that was not the character the spectators recognised. On the other hand, since we all wore costumes and had a score of physical actions, a peculiar form of behaviour and particular props to dance with, any one of us could easily have come up with the name of some character. This might perhaps have channelled the spectator's view and perception in a specific direction. But in *The Book of Dances* the director had chosen to leave the spectators alone, free to interpret the figures they saw dancing and interacting.

No story was told in *The Book of Dances*. There was one being told, however, in *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, my second performance. It was the story of the colonisation of The Americas: the encounter-clash between the pioneer culture and the culture of a native people. During the creation of the performance, I remember Eugenio Barba in the room, always wrapped up in a blue woollen blanket; looking like a cross between Linus (the character from Charles Schulz's

Snoopy cartoon) and an Indian from some reservation.

In April of 1974, at the beginning of the work on *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours* (a process that would take two years), Eugenio Barba told us that each of us would receive two characters: an obvious one and a secret one whose identity we were to reveal to no one. Eugenio likened the two characters to the two horses used in battle by the warriors of a tribe Alexander the Great had once fought against. During the battle, the warrior would use the horses to hide behind, enabling him to spring from one to the other in the aim of disorienting the enemy, and to be sure of having at least one horse on which to return to the encampment. The function of the secret character was to help the actor bounce back and forth between two identities, thereby avoiding the risk of having the obvious character seem shallow; a strategy, in short, to avoid falling into the trap of cliché. Moreover, should the actor prove unsuccessful in giving form to the obvious character, there was always the secret character to call upon for inspiration. But, in the days of *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, I was not yet thinking in terms of a character. Being very young, I used my "free and untamed" energy for the actions of the Indian girl that I represented on stage. And even when, in the course of the performance - during what amounted to a rape scene - my costume was transformed and I finally became "civilised", the quality of energy that I used did not change very much. The "extraordinary" (extra-daily) side of my presence consisted of the actions carried out in relation to my colleagues, the idiom I spoke (Objiwa, the language of a tribe of Native North American Indians), the costume that I wore (a Peruvian dress), and the banjo that I played.

The actions that I performed were taken from a series of improvisations: the first improvisations of my life. Once set, these improvisa-

tions were "edited" by Eugenio Barba, who could then alternate fragments of this material with parts of another colleague's improvisation, thereby creating a dialogue of actions and reactions that defined the (hi)story of the character. The improvisations did not start from a theme directly linked to the performance and, for this reason, were not descriptive. Eugenio would give themes like, "Cognac runs through my veins", or "Like a jaguar on the snows of Mt. Kilimanjaro". This kind of theme gave to my actions a surprising yet credible characteristic, in as much as the spectator could associate these actions with "my" Indian, a person belonging to another culture.

Torgeir Wethal, Else Marie Laukvik and Tage Larsen were the colonials and wore boots. Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Tom Fjordfalk and I were the Indians and went barefoot. But it would not have been possible to say that I was working on a character, rather, that I concentrated on giving my utmost. A bit like in the athletic competitions I had participated in years before, where a total presence of my body-mind had been required.

It was in my third performance, *Brecht's Ashes*, which we worked on from 1978 to 1980, that I ran up against the need to create a fully-fledged character: one that constituted a character both for me and for the spectators. The fact of having to represent three different figures in the same performance compelled me to seek a method for keeping them distinguishable. And so it was that I began thinking of them as different people. Given that the peculiarities of a person reach us through physical signals - recurrent and precise forms of behaviour - I looked for physical characteristics that could define each of the three characters. I invented three ways of speaking, of walking, of being: the limping walk and the aggressive, mocking songs of Polly Peachum; Yvette Pottier's slovenly gait and sombre, moving chant; the singsong speech of

Margarethe Steffin. Thus, the three characters found themselves acting in three different ways and I was able to jump from one to the other without confusing them, feeling at ease in each one of them. Not only had I put on three different costumes, but three different behaviours as well. And, for the first time on stage, I wore shoes: red shoes, with vertiginously high heels. Those shoes were to have a major influence on my way of moving through the performance space. I no longer had the grip on the ground that bare feet had afforded me in the first two performances, the direct contact with the floor that made me feel at one with the earth. Now, twelve cm off the ground, I tottered about, struggling to keep my balance on a slippery surface. These shoes constituted a limitation - and for that very reason they worked. They helped me to avoid repeating the way of moving that had characterised my work up to that point.

Going from the need to differentiate between the various characters to questions concerning the identity of their imaginary personalities was a natural step.

An entry in my work diary at that time reads: "The secret lies in looking for and finding oneself in one of our former lives. For this reason it is necessary to know about the history of the period that you're researching and what the social and cultural conditions were that determined our spirit's actions and reactions in that era."

In that period we were also doing another performance: *The Million*. It was our second dance performance. I played the drums, a natural development of my work from the primitive percussion instruments in *The Book of Dances*. In *The Million*, too, I had several characters. But in this case, drawing a clear and visible distinction between them did not constitute a problem, since their behaviour was already set and distinct. My only task was to make it mine. The first character was that of a lion drawn from the tradition of Kabuki theatre; the second was a

Brazilian dancer; the third was the caricature of a man chasing a woman.

The dances of the lion and of the Brazilian dancer belonged to the Japanese Kabuki and the Brazilian *capoeira* and *candomblé* traditions respectively. I had learned them from Japanese and Brazilian masters, after which Eugenio Barba had re-elaborated them and placed them in our performance which recounted the travel adventures of Marco Polo.

In the Japanese dance I wore a pair of *tabis* (Japanese socks made of cloth), but otherwise I danced barefoot, which gave me a feeling of great freedom.

During the phase of elaboration, when the dances were set in relationship to the dances of the other colleagues, the first two characters gradually began taking on appearances of *animus* and *anima*, thanks also to the costumes and to the story the director created using the actions of the dance. As for the third character, the man chasing a woman (the woman being a grotesque vamp impersonated by Iben Nagel Rasmussen), I merely had to put on my hat and coat and I knew exactly what to do. Following the rhythm of a beating drum, I came up with a series of actions to which Iben reacted in accordance with the dynamics of her character. Her reactions provoked other actions in my character. Within a few hours we had set the dance. In that particular case, I can safely say that the character created the dance for me... while I merely took pleasure in going along with it.

The fact of working with the same actors and with the same director for many years obviously has advantages and disadvantages. The most obvious advantage is that through this reciprocal familiarity a profound sense of trust is created. What's more, a work related jargon is established that allows us to communicate very quickly.

The most obvious disadvantage is that



Roberta Carreri as Polly Peachum
Photo: Tony D'Urso

Eugenio finds himself working, performance after performance, with the same core of actors which could become very monotonous, both for him and the actors. At the start of work on a new performance this disadvantage leads us to devise new ways of being present on stage, ways that allow us to surprise and stimulate the director and each other. Each time we have begun a new performance, Eugenio has attempted to place himself and the rest of us in a new situation.

Work on *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, in 1984, began with choosing the

costumes.

The workroom is divided in two by a black curtain. Hidden behind it lies Eugenio's booty, the result of the journey he made through South America with the next performance in mind. Eugenio sits by the curtain with a deck of cards in his hand. Each actor is invited to draw a card. Whoever draws the lowest card is first to go behind the black curtain where an element of costume is chosen. Then the next person goes in. When everyone has been behind the black curtain we return, one by one and in the same order, to fetch a new object. This goes on until the area behind the black curtain is empty and the actors have filled their arms with fabrics, costumes and props.

Behind the curtain were hung all the elements of a ceremonial dress of a *Mae de Santo*. Each time a colleague emerged from behind the black curtain I was afraid he or she had taken a part of what I had immediately recognised as being "my" costume. But no one had. My character was Antigone, but the "secret" one was Teresa Battista Tired of War, the protagonist of the eponymous novel by Jorge Amado. Antigone's Brazilian costume, with its many layers of white skirts, airy and rustling against my bare legs, influenced my way of interpreting the physical score of the performance. It awakened in me a new way of moving that evoked the sacredness and sensuality typical of warm climates. On the polished surface of the long platform that constituted the central element of the stage design in *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, I was once again working barefoot.

Unlike in past performances, we did not make use of individual improvisations for the creation of *Oxyrhincus*. To tell the truth, I made only one improvisation, the theme of which was the text of *The Three Bears*, the children's story I was reading to my daughter every evening.

As a basis for work on the performance,

Eugenio had us create what he called "marble", that is to say physical scores stemming from actions performed by two people sharing the same object (a chair, a poncho, a plastic tube). These sequences of actions were then set by each couple and later repeated by each person on his/her own and without the object. Eugenio then proceeded to "sculpt" this "marble", using the various sequences of actions to create different scenes of the performance.

When I performed one of my sequences wearing the costume and in the context of a scene, I became aware of the fact that in the eyes of the spectator it would be Antigone acting: in relation to her sister Ismene, to her brother Polynices, or to Creon. This awareness of Antigone's relationship with the other characters led me to interpret the different sequences accordingly. That is: I would endow with meaning a physical score that originally lacked significance by adapting it to the different scenes.

In the course of the performance my costume changed, and with each change it gave me the stateliness, sacredness, sensuality and the strength needed to mark the transformations undergone by the character.

At times on stage I was overcome by a very strange sensation. I felt that in reality I was not Antigone. At the same time, I was not "not-Antigone" (as Richard Schechner, the theatre scholar, might put it). Nor was I Roberta, the daughter and mother. On stage, however, was where I felt I existed with the greatest intensity. Who, then, was I?

Judith (1987) was my first solo performance. It arose out of the need to avoid going on tour for months at a time, so that I could spend more time in Holstebro, now that my daughter Alice had started school. The physical dynamics of this character (taken directly from the Bible) were determined by my experience in Japan with Natsu Nakajima and Kazuo Ohno, two masters of Butoh dance.

Working with Natsu Nakajima I discovered an unexpected quality of presence in myself, a quality that I could call "presence through absence". This might sound like a play on words, but in fact it refers to a technique of work with the eyes in which, instead of focusing on the external world, the actor turns his gaze inward.

While working with Natsu Nakajima and Kazuo Ohno I was also able to experience the extremely slow rhythm of movement that is typical of Butoh dance. This is not merely a question of working in slow motion (which had for years constituted a part of my training), but of succeeding in slowing down the pulsation of the mind and being totally present in the stillness or the fury of the moment.

Upon returning from Japan, I discovered that mice had invaded my house and had nested in the chest of drawers that contained my favourite garments. My gorgeous, antique nightgown of pure white silk had been chewed up in several spots. It was completely ruined, shredded. I was reminded of the tattered costumes I had seen in a performance in Tokyo. That's when I decided to put it on and show Eugenio the work I had done in Japan as well as the material that constituted my present training.

After twelve years of work with Odin Teatret, my training no longer simply included physical exercises and work with various principles and props, but also the creation of dances and the elaboration of sequences of actions. In the context of training, I was developing my own form of actor's dramaturgy. Most of the physical scores of *Judith* were created in the space/time dedicated to training. *Judith* had already come across her true nature long before starting work with the director.

So, by the time Eugenio and I entered the room to work on the performance, we already had a story and a name for the character. I had nearly an hour's worth of physical

scores, and a choice of texts and music to propose to him. In the month of work together, eight hours a day, day in and day out, Eugenio had me create new improvisations with objects of his choice. We looked for new music and composed new texts. The character was built up around the nucleus of presence that I had found in Japan.

Judith's quality of presence was in reaction to Antigone's vitality in *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*. But from Antigone, Judith inherited the bare feet and the free-flowing hair.

A reaction to Judith's airy presence would later be found in the presence of the Mother in *Kaosmos*.

Thursday, May 7, 1992 - We go into the black room elegantly dressed, and bringing along a blanket, or something similar. We begin work on *Kaosmos* with a lengthy verbal improvisation by Eugenio based on the first chapter of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. We've all read it, at least that first chapter. Eugenio's verbal improvisation is the theme of our first improvisation. I've brought a Peruvian poncho with me and improvise while moving only on the poncho. I'm dressed in black, with a light dress, a tightly fitting overcoat and high heels.

I set the improvisation using a method Torgeir Wethal calls "one step at a time": I do the first action and repeat it immediately, followed by the second; I repeat the first two actions, followed by the third; I repeat the first three actions... and so on. In this way, each action of the improvisation has a precise mental image. Repeating them immediately facilitates the process of memorisation.

In just over an hour I am able to set a fifteen-minute improvisation. I don't know if this type of work can really be called improvisation. The images are invented more than improvised, but I imagine that calling them inventions might create confusion.

At the start of work on *Kaosmos* we are

not told the names of the characters, neither the obvious nor the secret ones.

August 8, 1992 - Eugenio says, "In his diaries, Christopher Columbus describes his dialogue with the sea, with the seaweed, with the birds... In the creation of a performance, there comes a moment where it is necessary to have a dialogue. What we are doing at present seems familiar to us, but the essence is different. At some point in the work I will tell you the theme of the performance. We don't yet know what this performance is about and, as actors, you ask yourselves, who am I in all of this? What is my identity? This project resembles the preparation of *Min Fars Hus*. We are now far from land. If there is no theme, there are no limits. If there are no limits, there is no freedom. Freedom, in a given situation, is doing that which one deems just. I now know that I must choose the course to take, and this deprives me of other possibilities. Up to now, there has been something both pleasant and unpleasant in this work; I was on an iceberg being swept along by a current."

For months I work on the performance without knowing who my character is, who is performing my actions, who is singing the songs I sing. At every opportunity Eugenio tells me: "What you're doing is too much like Judith", referring to the character of my solo performance.

Interpreting the same character for so many years has rooted its physical dynamics in me. They've become second nature now, and threaten to colour everything I do on stage.

I no longer know how to move. I feel I am suffocating. I ask Eugenio to assign a character to me, to tell me who I am in this performance. Eugenio does not yet want to do so, suggesting, however, that I work on Medea. Medea is to be my "secret" character in *Kaosmos*.

Towards the end of August Eugenio gives me a character: the Mother in *The Story of a*

Mother, by Hans Christian Andersen. It is the story of a woman whose son is taken away from her by Death. The Mother sets out to look for Death in the hope of retrieving her son. After enduring many ordeals - which cause, among other things, the loss of her eyes and her hair to turn white - the Mother finally arrives in Death's garden where she recognises the presence of her child's life in the form of a withered crocus. The Mother asks Death to give her back her son. In reply, Death gives her back her eyesight and invites her to look into a nearby well. Therein she will see the course of two lives: a happy life and a miserable one. One of the two lives is her son's. The Mother peers into the well and then begs Death to tell her which of the two is her son's life. Death refuses to tell her. In the end, the Mother prefers to leave her son in the hands of Death rather than have the son run the risk of living a miserable and unhappy existence.

In September I am in Greece working. I am in Medea's native land, and here I *must* find the costume for the performance. I know from experience that the costume is a deter-

mining factor for the character. Its weight, the colour of the fabric, its form, the costume's age, all influence my way of being on stage. In a dusty old shop where they sell antique folkloric costumes I find various articles that serve my purpose. Medea is starting to take form, to have some weight. It's a costume in layers, like Antigone's, but this time each layer is heavy: chamois leather, robust hand-woven cotton, raw wool, heavy satin, woollen felt. The colours alternate as well: red, white, black, red, white... In reaction to the "unbearable lightness" that resulted from not knowing who my character was in the performance, I now long for a heaviness that soon turns out to be claustrophobic. Even my hair will take on weight, wrapped around a huge skein of black wool that girds my head.

"Judith" is light, almost diaphanous. She is barefoot and with loosely flowing hair. Medea will be Mother Earth: weighty, rooted, tough. With black, old fashioned shoes, and bold heels. Medea - the Mother. But the character of Medea was present in *my* mind only. The spectators found no trace of her in the objectivity of the performance.



Judith
Photo: Torben Huss

Out of the ashes of *Kaosmos*, towards the end of 1996, was born *Inside the Whale's Skeleton*. In this performance I use the physical score from *Kaosmos* but wear a short, light, cyclamen-coloured dress, with white embroidered pockets and collar, along with a pair of remotely military ankle boots ("clod hoppers", as my father would have called them). These shoes, easily imagined on the feet of some village idiot, totally transformed my way of being on stage. It was a surprising experience. In spite of the fact that the pattern of my actions was essentially identical, the sequence of actions that I had carried out for years literally exploded into an almost dangerous freedom. The force that was required to move the cumbersome Mother costume could now gush forth without restraint. A different character, originating from a pair of shoes, has taken possession of the actions and songs of the Mother from *Kaosmos* and, in making them her own, has given them a sparkling, new vitality.

Whenever possible, I begin work on the new performance by learning a new technique in order to cleanse myself of the physical dynamics of my character in the preceding performance. After *Kaosmos*, I went to Seville to learn flamenco dance. I thought that this kind of presence might become the starting point for the creation of my next character in the performance to come.

Before beginning work with the actors on *Mythos*, Eugenio had prepared and decided everything in advance: the stage design, the lighting, the characters and the authors. This was something he had not done since *Ornitofilene*, Odin Teatret's first performance.

It was the beginning of 1998. *Mythos* was the first indoor performance in the Odin's history in which all the actors had worked on at least one past performance with Eugenio. At last, there was no new actor to be "educated" by Eugenio during the course of work on the performance. This led me to

hope that Eugenio would have more time to concentrate on my acting work. But no. Technical and stage design problems took up most of our time. He too, perhaps, was glad not to have to form any new actors but simply rely on us. Or was he incapable of stimulating me? Practical work with Eugenio on the character of Cassandra was limited to a couple of Saturday mornings and a few brief moments here and there. It was impossible for me to hide a feeling of enormous frustration mixed with an equally strong sense of abandon.

I hardly used any of the flamenco I had learned for the character of Cassandra in *Mythos*, apart from a form of tension in the spine that pulls the nape of the neck upwards and thrusts out the chest and "tail". I use this tension in certain moments of the performance. During the long periods where I sit on or under one of the two towers on stage, I concentrate particularly on the work of the eyes: the eyes of a seer who does not want to see. Cassandra has a very specific physical dynamic, her own way of being, but she has practically no fixed physical score, except for a series of actions that serve a purely dramaturgical function linked to the other characters and to the story that we are all telling.

Already in *Kaosmos* I had begun improvising parts of the performance each evening in which I had no direct relationship to another actor. When the timing of another actor's efforts depends on my actions, I cannot allow myself to change them from one evening to the other to any great degree. This would be like improvising the text, saying different words to a partner who has learned specific lines chosen by the director.

In *Mythos*, Cassandra is a character "apart", an idiot (from the Greek, *idiotēs*, a private person, a layman, unfit for public function or communication). In the first part of the performance Cassandra sits isolated in one of the towers on stage. Her vital space is very limited. From that position I must

radiate my presence throughout the entire room, and therefore I work on the implosion of energy. Eugenio has forbidden me to perform any recognisable action. My mental images are very precise and Cassandra makes them concrete in her own way. Her interaction with the other characters is minimal, and this gives me great freedom. But I was able to take advantage of Cassandra's freedom only after having discovered her nature: her physical dynamics. And this began happening only after the first performance. The context made me discover Cassandra's way of being, one reminiscent of the different states of water: unforeseeable and smiling like a mountain stream; powerful and scalding like a violent jet of steam; soft and vague, like fog; but never hard as ice.

I have not yet spoken about the character I have lived with longest: Geronimo. Geronimo is one of the figures from *Anabasis*, our street performance, and from *Ode to Progress*, our current dance performance. Geronimo was born in July 1976, on the island of Møn, in Denmark. In April of the same year we had held the premier of *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours* at the Caracas Festival. Two weeks later, Odin Teatret had penetrated the Venezuelan jungle on the heels of a film crew and a French anthropologist, with the aim of realising a barter with a tribe of Yanomami Indians. In the heart of the jungle a young Yanomami girl had cut my hair very short, in the typical Indian style. That was also the last time I ever had short hair.

On Møn, I was asked to take part in a street performance with two other actors from the group. Since I had no costume, I found myself borrowing a pair of shoes, some black trousers, red braces, a shirt and a bow tie from an actor who was six-foot-two and weighed two hundred and twenty pounds. Everything was far too big for me but clean and in perfect condition.

I happened to have a top hat with me that went perfectly with the Indian haircut. Dressed like this, I looked at myself in the mirror and found that I bore a certain resemblance to one of those daguerreotype photographs of North American Indians wearing *white man's clothes*, who wanted to appear all dressed up, but looked comical instead. I baptised myself "Geronimo". It was summer and Geronimo held a piece of straw between his teeth. This allowed him to remain silent while gazing at the surrounding world with wide, dreamy eyes. Geronimo originated from a costume and from my longing for absolute innocence. It is perhaps because of his innocence that he can walk right up to people, look deep in their eyes and take whatever he pleases. The fact that the character is male has not compromised his sweetness or his vitality, nor has it curbed his dancing spirit. On the other hand, his being male and simple-minded frees me from a series of clichés of feminine behaviour and from the risk of being "me" on a private level.

Geronimo is truly a person for me, much more than for a spectator who doesn't know his name or anything about him, and who certainly cannot perceive the reference to reservation Indians, for example. Now that my hair has grown, I hide it inside the top hat. His hat, his shoes and his "voice" (a duck call) are his mask.

It is now clear to me that my process of creating characters has undergone changes through the years.

At the start of my professional history, in *The Book of Dances* or in *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, my actions and my way of performing them were independent of my character. The director's work justified them. A key to interpreting my actions lay in the title of the performance or in the name of my character in the programme. One could say that the character was created in the mind of the spectator, thanks to the director.

During the elaboration of *Brecht's Ashes* my attention began focusing on the character's identity and on colouring the energetic quality of my stage presence.

In *Judith*, the character was once again created in the mind of the spectator. A mere change of title - *Medea* or *Lady Macbeth*, for example - would have changed the story in the mind of the spectator. I would not even need to alter my actions and it would not have been necessary to change *all* of the texts. A few substitutions would have sufficed.

With *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus* and *Kaosmos*, originally my actions had nothing to do with the theme of the performance, or with the story of the character. Only later, in a second phase, did I begin "interpreting" them in accordance with Sophocles' story of Antigone and Hans Christian Andersen's tale of *The Mother*.

At the beginning of work on *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, Eugenio asked us to write a script telling the story of our character within the context of the performance. I justified all of the actions I performed, as well as the situations in which I found myself in the performance, by referring to events in the story of Antigone. The character seen by the spectators and the character that I was living on stage were the same.

In *Mythos* my actions stem directly from that which distinguishes Cassandra: her way of seeing. I would even go so far as to say that the actions are secondary in terms of the character's way of being, what I previously referred to as "her physical dynamics"; her behaviour.

In conclusion, I feel that these twenty-five years have been a long journey both "towards" as well as "away from" the character. A constant effort to rid myself of a former character in order to allow a new one to be born. A continuous game of negation: doing the opposite of what I had done before. The "opposite" can be many things. I had never made theatre before starting to work

with Odin Teatret. In the beginning, the fact of delegating to the director the responsibility for creating a character in the mind of the spectator was surely an advantage for me. And, still today, I can feel a touch of nostalgia for that past freedom. But, alas, my innocence is lost: I can no longer avoid seeing my character through the eyes of the spectator as well.

These twenty-five years could also be seen as a long, long education in theatre. And I know that this education is not yet over for me, that there are still years of apprenticeship in this profession - a profession in which I truly believe one never ceases to learn. Working on a character is endless, because the character is a pretext, a way of channelling some form of presence, or a passion. In the words of Jeanette Winterson, "passion is not so much an emotion as a destiny".

This work is my passion.

Translated from Italian by
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