

An Interview With Carlos Repetto

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HANS GEORG: Carlos, can you tell us how you developed your work and what this "Theatre Of Gesture" is all about?

CARLOS: My interest in the theatre extends back as far as my childhood. The impressions I got during my first experiences in school have molded me indelibly. Play-acting became something natural for me. By the way, I am convinced that man is an imitator (Mimeur) by nature. Through the different disciplines connected with theater we find again a unique possibility to express our knowledge of the world, our knowledge of reality. And this knowledge is alive in us, in our bodies.

In 1972 I met Alberto Saza, an Argentine actor. I worked with him and taught in his school. The classic mime was what we examined primarily, and what has determined the direction of my own research. At this time we felt that the forms of bodily expression of the mime described an ossified man. The feeling they generated in the spectators was caused more by an intellectual understanding of the action and not

by an immediate recognition. A complete revision of the mimic gesture became necessary.

Out of this work arose what later became the theater of gesture for me. It is important for me to understand



L to R: Hans Georg and Carlos Repetto

now that theatre, which developed out of the human gesture, cannot be contained in the classically dramatic forms. We have to develop the dramatic forms, which are peculiar for both the instrument of the expression - the body - and its language.

HANS GEORG: Talking about human beings and their expression through body-language one can say: A single person - in daily life or engaged in acting - is never acting

only out of herself but in an everlasting exchange with other persons and the world around. Or to say it in your words: The body is always an answer, a response; response not only to inner impulses but also to everything that is going on outside the person.

CARLOS: That is right. One of the characteristics of this physical answer of the human being is simultaneity, i.e., the body responds constantly to innumerable parameters. The individual, of course, is completely passive in this activity and discovers only what appears at the most superficial level of consciousness. The rest happens without his/her knowledge.

Another characteristic of the human answer is habit. Over 90% of our answers are habit; the unusual answers are rare. They are the result of unusual situations that an individual finds himself in or the presence of a particularly awake and attentive condition of consciousness.

The body is the material support of human complexity and in a more extensive capacity the recipient of

life. From this viewpoint one can say that the totality of human answers are physical.

In connection with this it is necessary to remember that the answer of the body is neither a psychological abstraction nor an intellectual speculation. A physical answer is very concrete and something to experience directly.

HANS GEORG: What does that mean in regard to the developmental aspect of individuals and of mankind?

CARLOS: From birth, the child inevitably loses through the far open window of its eyes, its contact with prenatal perceptions. It steps with both feet into reality, which is different from itself. This progressive discovery of the world leads to the appearance of two of the most fascinating inclinations of human nature: communication and imitation. Both are connected with each other in an intimate way. By making use of communication as an impulse and of imitation as a means, the child, even without knowing, starts to build his life along his experiences. That is how the child learns.

The gesticulatory transmission, which is taking place through the mother/child connection, goes far beyond the family. The mother is actually an initiation into the culture of mankind. During this time we all receive knowledge that has accumulated over thousands of years and transferred from generation to generation.

Gestures, movements and actions are the support of this transmission. For the body it is particularly through gestures, movements and actions that it learns.

The basic method of human learning is through trial and error. Of course, the lived experiences of an individual are first molded by his/her character, and then by the individual's own psychological structure. In the end, the whole is embedded in the socio-cultural environment of which every person is a part. Nevertheless, we know very well that our memory is restricted, that we remember very little. But the information is not lost, it remains latent and hidden inside of us.

Interviewer's Note: Carlos Repetto was born in 1947 in Argentina. He studied Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Buenos Aires and acting with different directors. He has been living in Europe since 1977 where he took part in international festivals in France, Poland and Spain. In 1981, Carlos Repetto founded his own school in Paris where a research group was formed. Over the years he developed "The Theatre of Gesture," a distinctive kind of theatre of improvisation. Since 1986 he has been living in Freiburg, Germany, where the work of research regarding the Theatre of Gesture and Body Theatre was resumed and broadened. He directed several plays in Germany, Switzerland and France.

I met Carlos Repetto two years ago, and since then I have become part of an ongoing training group. Participating in his workshops has shown me how crucial the role which gravity, body structure and axes, and the relationship of the body in space play in his original work.

It was a vision of Ida Rolf that her work, her structural point of view, influence not only health care, but also life sciences and philosophy as well as the understanding of plastic arts, movement work, dance and theatre. The following interview presents some insights into the experience and the underlying philosophy of one of the most important persons in the international life of creative theatre. It is meant as a contribution to the fulfillment of Ida Rolf's vision of a fruitful dialogue between Rolfing and other fields exploring the conditions of Human Being.

The associative mechanisms which conduct the activation of this hidden mechanism is the starting point of numerous psychological therapies and body therapies like Rolfing®. We know through experience that a task learned by the body is always available even if it hasn't been performed for a long time. The body remembers. This memory of the body includes not only the availability of more or less complex movements given in one order, but it is also the awakening of all associations which reconcile the coherence of experiences connected to learning and practicing the remembered task.

It is exactly this ability which slumbers and keeps watch in the body that interests us first. All of these memories are an open door for the mechanisms of psychology and to reach further into the human creative potential.

HANS GEORG: As a Rolfer, I noticed that the process of structural integration is a helpful tool for many people to develop the creative potential of their body perception and expression.

CARLOS: Anything that can help to feel more in the body and the tensions which permanently inhabit him is a great help, of course, particularly for an actor. What concerns Rolfing, especially, is that it can create immediate and durable contact with the memories concerning posture in a practical way. Memories which have found their place in the delicate connections between our body segments and between our muscles.

What seems important to me according to my own experience with Rolfing, is this impression I got after a session: to be able to recognize a physical posture/movement which had been forgotten. I feel this, frankly speaking, as exceptional and full of possibilities of learning. In my

opinion, it is a proof of the therapeutic possibilities of Rolfing and at the same time a challenge for the client. It is a demand to make one's own contribution to the therapeutic process.

This impression I have of a posture found again has to be accompanied by active participation in the revival. In the reactivation of the posture I am invited to become active, but not only by a mechanical correction. I have rather an inner impression that I only need to stimulate in order to reactivate the posture.

This form of relationship with the inner impression is in itself creative. It is creative because the ordinary connection with my body and its attitudes - a mechanical and unconscious connection - is shaken. For instance, I have to search for how I can stimulate and maintain this other manner of relationship.

Concerning persons who have had Rolfing therapy, I can appreciate a relative change in their relationship with their own bodies. I think that one posture stands directly in relationship with the experiences of the individual. Each change of posture leads necessarily to a change in the connecting forms of the composition of the psychological atmosphere, in which the individual is permanently taking a bath.

As long as the person is active in this process the differences are visible. But if the connection little by little becomes mechanical, these differences integrate themselves in the spectrum of the old physical answers and are no longer visible. The individual forgets itself in this case, i.e., he/she becomes passive. Gradually, the old forms gain the upper hand. One has to face this danger.

HANS GEORG: Where and when did you hear about Rolfing for the

first time?

CARLOS: Years ago the case of a young girl who was in a working group I conducted in Basel (Switzerland) impressed me very much. The girl had great problems with her posture. Her body was locked up literally into itself. Of course, this being locked up wasn't only physical but was a reflection of her inner attitude. She had problems relating and expressing herself to others and didn't succeed in communicating with the group. She left the group after a certain time.

Two years later I started with a new group in Zurich. The same girl was among the participants. How great was my surprise when I saw her! It was not possible to recognize her, not just physically but also emotionally. Her body had really changed: her shoulders which were loaded heavily before, fell relaxed down and back, and through the release her chest became free and natural. Changes also concerned the back and nape of the neck, which now supported her head with a continuity of the spine in its right place. She was quite another person, accessible and casual, she felt easy. After a short time she became one of the most advanced participants and played an important role within the group. Of course I was interested in her changes. And that is why I heard about Rolfing for the first time. She told me at length about her experience and informed me about the principles of this therapy.

HANS GEORG: Experiencing and dealing with the axes of one's body are of crucial importance in your work as well as in Rolfing.

CARLOS: Yes, this is right. One of the elements which seems important for me to develop is that one of the axes. In spite of this characteristic upright posture - this place of the "homo erectus" within the nomencla-

ture of life - seldom are human beings in a vertical position. The human being opposes this vertical, although verticality is implicit in the laws of gravity to which all physical bodies on this planet are subject. Verticality is often called into question.

These alterations in the axes of human beings are not coincidental. They are the outer expression of subjective preferences in the perception of the surroundings at the moment where the fixation of a habitual posture in the body corresponds to a social attitude which is connected to the structure of the personality.

Being physical bodies we have a center of gravity. This, however is not at the same place in every human being. Where it is individually depends on different factors: it depends on the totality of all tensions with which we maintain our posture; on the inclination of the vertical body axis diverging from the axis of *gravity*; on the volume and density of our body; and last but not least, it depends on something which is very difficult to assess and to define, something that has to do with the connection that each of us has with the outer and the inner world.

Postures, in my opinion, are the biggest mirror of what is lived by an individual. Life forms and models the body in a very subtle way. In each position a body is in, it always has a vertical axis. For me this vertical is the representation of the present state of being; the horizontal axes are representations of action. Whether he wants to or not, a human being throws his actions outward and is permanently he is thrown to the outside (into his environment). The horizontal axes are the vectors of this dynamic. I think, indeed, that the vertical is the axis of the Being. It is now that I am. The human being, unfortunately, is projected into the

sphere of Doing, i.e., he/she too often loses contact with the sphere of Being.

This projection is not only psychological, it is material. This atmosphere which surrounds the human being defines a basic position. This becomes, little by little, his body

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structure and the form of his/her whole expression and manifestation. Here we are in the middle of the center of the old difficulties of communication and expression of human nature. The human being expresses and communicates something which he doesn't feel. If we say that he is projected into the sphere of Doing, while he loses contact with the sphere of Being, this is also physically meant and very real. It is the nature that is projected, there is no longer someone who acts. The human being is mixed with his action. He is *his action*.

The lack of distance between this acting person and her actions is primarily a lack of contact with herself. The absence of perception of

the self is the beginning of the difficulty to communicate.

Human expression is, if one looks at it from this point of view, the communication with a perception either of the past, with a manifestation of needs/wishes for something, or of waiting for something which will be in the future. The most essential characteristic of the expression is the missing of topicality. At the present moment the individual does not feel himself, nor does he know that he does not feel himself.

This is what I mean when I say that the verticality of the human being is compromised, is questioned. A study of postures is very instructive regarding this, and it seems necessary to me to deepen our knowledge in this area. This is exactly what we do in our working groups. Two persons in relationship to each other are two axes in relationship to each other. And a true relationship can arise only from axis to axis.

Perhaps it is easier to imagine the importance of the center of gravity for dancers, which the quality of their dynamics depends on. This is also essential for an actor/actress. The taste of the authenticity of her gesture and her expression is connected in an intimate way to the right position of her center of gravity.

One can say that two forces are always present: one is connected to the verticality of gravity and with Being, the other is connected with the desire for action and Doing. For an actor/actress it is important to feel both forces at least approximately. His/her action becomes external and caricatural without this perception.

HANS GEORG: The attention of the actor for his own body structure and for those he's acting with is essential in your work. What you say also shows how difficult it is to develop

attention as a more common state of perception.

CARLOS: Yes, it is a difficult topic. Therefore, I have to go back a long way at this point. The body is listening actively on the outside and on the inside. If I am confronted by any situations - and I am always in a situation - my body actively takes part in the perception. It constantly sends me signals about how all of my psychological structure reacts to the situation in question. This process is complex. The body is the place, it is the residence of a definite manifestation of the living. At the same moment the complete learned information is available, the lived is available, this genetic inheritance. Everything is available and ready for use.

Unfortunately, there is a problem: the human being cannot make use of his attention because his attention is weak, absent-minded and generally peripheral. This is the human condition. If we examine our perceptions, what I actually see is very little. If someone would ask me unexpectedly what I am aware of about myself, the answer would be very embarrassing. In general, the perception of the self is limited to the interest of the moment. This interest can be projected to the outside or inside, this does not make any difference. I have on no account a global perception of myself. And primarily, I'm not contained in my perception while I perceive.

In my opinion, this last perception is the most interesting one because I become the object being viewed at this moment. And so, I can learn from my manifestations. I am the one who looks and the one who will be seen. All of this is very difficult and only achieved step by step. But I think it's important to understand which meaning my body has and what it

can teach me in working on expression and communication.

A very simple example: I look at an object. In general, my connection with the object is such that I mostly don't see what surrounds the object. Even more, I'm not at all aware of myself looking at the object. What I

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want to say is that I am not sensitive to my sensibility of the eyesight. I only see the object.

I think that it is important to remember that the work which I develop in my courses doesn't have the intention to cause any change. Its aim is not therapeutic. The body that interests us is the body as it is, there is no model to be achieved.

An actor is constantly confronted with it in order to play different persons of different ages and cultures. What interests an actor is the possibility of using the knowledge accumulated by his body memory in order to be able to understand better and fill out a role.

In this sense the knowledge of physical structures and of his own structure seems essential. A posture is a consequence. It is fixed in the body

by a variety of factors. And by its repetition it can become a habit. This fixation in the body is accompanied by complex manifestations which are connected with the psychology of the individual person.

One could say that every posture corresponds with a definite climate, or situation. If the posture is known by the body for some time, the initiation of it may come from the individual or the situation. The climate causes the posture and vice versa. This point is most interesting to see from the point of view of the expression. If an actor can approach a posture - not in a peripheral or caricatural way but in a structural way - at this moment he gets the information about the corresponding climate. This means a direct knowledge of the psychological aspects which accompany the climate and the posture.

In a certain respect, the request consists not of "to make" a role (in French one would say: a "personage"), but to lend my own body, so that it can be available for another form different from mine.

This transformation is possible because the human being is essentially an imitator. The ability to imitate is enormous, and I think that it goes much deeper than the mime's more or less excellent physical posture. Human beings imitate everything. One can model oneself after patterns of thoughts, after life-forms, etc. One sees the effect of fashion, propaganda, advertising, etc. Certainly, there are psychological reasons - problems of identification, personality problems, etc. But psychology wouldn't be sufficient if there was not this capacity to mime and play. It is fascinating to recognize the imitator in the child. One feels that behind that imitation is more than a game: the child informs itself, it learns.

HANS GEORG: You have developed a technique called "Walking in the corridors." One of the characteristics of this exercise is that the participants are moving in straight lines and at right angles to each other. What is the underlying meaning of that?

CARLOS: The first relationship which a human being has is the spatial relationship. Everything happens in a given space. This variable, the space, determines, in a subtle way, everything the individual makes of a situation. The technique of the "walks" is very simple: it is to go in straight lines only. One goes neither in circles or diagonals in the space, and the changes of direction happen at right angles.

These sequences of locomotion weave an invisible grid in the space where human beings meet each other accidentally. They cross, go together in front of or behind the other, etc. This way of using the room permits people to be constantly in a clear spatial relationship: in front of, behind, nearby or far away, etc.

It is obvious that most of the time I have no idea where I am, spatially speaking. Of course, I know why I am there, at least generally. But I don't have any perception about my position in space. Everything is connected with the interest I have and which has probably led me to this place. Perhaps I could place myself with respect to the center of my interest: "...I was in front of her and her friend came from the right side. I left to the left..." The example talks about an everyday action, but very probably at the same moment the narrator was not aware of the first level of his attention, of his spatial position.

In the exercise "Walking in the corridors," the actor/actress increasingly sensitizes himself/herself to the positions in space. He/she learns to

feel himself/herself in a definite place and to give this spatial position a meaning.

By opening to the space, actors/actresses are more able to understand the value of their actions and the importance of their actions for the perception of the totality of the outside by the spectators.

One should perhaps speak a bit about the perception of the outside. There is the perception of the audience, but there is also the perception of the actor of himself. Necessarily, there is a difference between these two perceptions since they both are bound to a perceiving subjectivity. Without going into detail one could say that working on communication is working on the reduction of this difference.