



Rasia Friedler

# Spontaneous dance in unconventional spaces

**Rasia Friedler**, Founder and Director of SaludArte in Uruguay, states their approach to health and wellbeing

**The question of enjoying life is closely linked to amusement, in the sense of distancing oneself from something to then return to something else.** Indeed, to be able to laugh about something it is necessary to distance oneself from it. This idea links with the old saying that life is a tragedy seen close up and a comedy seen from afar.

Being a psychologist in the first place, the heart of my interest has always been creativity, resilience, spontaneity and humour, all of them nurtured by ambiguity and uncertainty. The development of my career, which I call a 'craft', originates from being part of a long cultural Jewish tradition, which has cultivated the taste for discovering the hidden secrets of words and has explored the comic dimension of the human being.

This challenge moved me to start SaludArte, an institution oriented to health promotion through art and humour, a long-lasting dream that became true. SaludArte represents a turning point within a long professional and personal search for alternative ways of working in the area of health. It's an intersection of very different experiences and influences (psychoanalysis, psychodrama, invisible theatre, spontaneous theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Playback Theatre, clowning techniques, etc.). SaludArte strives to change a sanitary vision centered in the disease prioritising the assistance on prevention in first place, the disease instead of the person itself. There is always something beyond suffering and disease: a lost pleasure, a sparkle of happiness, an unknown talent, and

that 'something' is what I try to recover as a centre point. With this approach we get closer to those who suffer from their more vital angle, we come in touch with their force and imagination, with their silenced and silent voices.

Our work requires the active participation of patients, and we attempt to always maintain their engagement by installing a fictional or magical atmosphere. Even within the deepest pain the seed of hope is present. When the patient's partner or the nursing staff wish to take part, we include them in our work, for as health promoters, we always bear in mind the importance of the social networks that we are attempting to strengthen, maintain and, whenever possible, expand.

SaludArte was founded in Montevideo, Uruguay in 1999. Theatre





SaludArte

director and psycho-dramatist Bernardo Galli was the group's artistic consultant. While our work developed, we identified patients unable to communicate through words. This gave us an urge to include movement in our daily work so, together with Dallica Ballet Director Analía Alvarez, I started investigating, experimenting and creating, until we formed the first Spontaneous Dance Company.

I directed and trained a group of dancers in the technique and rituals of the new method. The specific dancers' training was enriched by their personal contribution and mastering of contemporary, classic, contact and Butoh dances, circus and performing arts. Movement and dance remained the privileged way of expression, although acting resources were also included. Other humanistic, artistic and

health training was also integrated into this particular company.

Spontaneous Dance is an artistic improvisation genre based on occurrences, sensations, feelings and stories that, once shared by the storyteller who emerges from the audience, are 'danced-back' and recreated by the dancers. There's a flow of forms and scenes that give new meaning and complexity, that enrich and revalue the stories heard. We discover again reality together with its aesthetic and/or comic side, prioritising the non-verbal languages. Our artistic mediators help to create an atmosphere in which people can express their discomfort, fantasies and dreams more freely, something essential for the emotional health. The Company is made up of dancers, musicians, a conductor and a director. Throughout the past years,

the Spontaneous Dance Company has carried out countless performances to promote health in unconventional spaces, thus strengthening the genre and its own style.

**Saturday afternoon, at the Montevideo International Airport terrace**

In these light and hasty times, where spaces to elaborate social process and to build and heal collective memory are scarce, art is an invaluable alternative to transform the 'no-places' into places of sensitivity, consciousness and memory.

Heritage Day is a celebration in Uruguay to build, communicate and consolidate an international solidarity awareness to protect World Cultural Heritage. On September 20, 2003, SaludArte Spontaneous



Spontaneous Dance is an artistic improvisation genre based on occurrences, sensations, feelings and stories that, once shared by the story-teller who emerges from the audience, are 'danced-back' and recreated by the dancers.

Dance Company held a show at an uncommon place: the International Montevideo Airport. Round Trip was the performance's name. It aimed to trigger memories from trips, departures, reunions; to provoke reflections about young people leaving the country, families being fragmented and many other painful situations witnessed at airports, which need healing.

#### **A dream**

The audience makes itself comfortable. The chairs are a glaring white thanks to the light coming through the glass windows. The dancers breath deeply, each of them sitting on a colourful block spread along the windows. Breathing can be heard.

The conductor takes the microphone to introduce the company, briefly explaining what Spontaneous Dance is. When the dancers are introduced, they share a personal feeling connecting a 'round trip' to their personal experiences. Rasia shares hers: "I love airports because they remind me of a longlasting dream: to fly". The whole company tries to stimulate participation, through generating confidence. The conductor, who keeps permanent eye contact with the audience, the musician and the dancers, asks the latter to build a statue and says the magic words: "Let's watch!"

Unexpectedly, the music starts and gives light to the movement. Several dancers stand up. A black block emerges entwined with the legs of a curly-haired dancer who surrenders to dance. Her body follows the rhythm, she looks like a black pencil drawing on a red sheet. She stretches her feet and jumps to reach the windowsill.

She's like a bird dazzled with the light. On the airstrip, two roaring planes take off almost simultaneously. The bird becomes a butterfly giving away bright colours, spreads its wings and turns into a statue. It looks as if it were swinging in the air and yet close to the audience.

The rest of the dancers seem to synchronise a particular set of catchy movements. A dancer jumps once and again, stretching his arms into the sky, opening his hands, with the anxiety of those waiting for the loved one, in a sort of silent prayer, the rain dance pretending to melt the clouds to water the earth. Another dancer, taller, with a deep gaze, takes a blue cloth, puts it on his shoulders and turns into the super hero we've all dreamt of, running across the stage, swaying the cloak with an aerodynamic effect. A dancer with a ribbon engages with the synchronised duet. She is in a spin, turning over herself, driven up and down by a strange invisible force. Slowing down, she becomes a puppet moved by strings that get tense and relax. Tangling with her mates, they move as a body towards the butterfly by the window sill. They impregnate her with energy and the four of them start dancing together, facing the audience, as four birds cuddling high on a wire between two concrete columns.

The scene freezes, it becomes a fluid sculpture giving away tenderness. The audience feels the urge to come and get some caring expressions. The triangle sounds. The audience applauds, laughs, make comments.

What's that? – asks an old lady from her chair.

It's a bird! – answers a thin girl by

her side, staring at the brand-new sculpture.

So, are they all birds? – she asks again, a bit impatient.

Yes, can't you see they all fly? – says the girl deeply concentrated on the sculpture.

No! It's a plane! – says a blonde boy sitting behind them.

No! – says his younger brother – it's an angel with long wings.

These are the final words.

#### **A wave of embraces**

The conductor invites the audience, "Who is willing to tell a story?" A man becomes nervous. He crosses his legs to one side, then to the other. He fixes his glasses. His skin is very pale, his eyes are clear and his voice is thick, "I'd like you to represent the leave-stay duality," (the tension between the excitement about leaving and starting an adventure or staying in a world we know).

Dancers listen to his words and get ready to transform them into movement. The conductor indicates a 'fluid sculpture' and tells the musician to start playing. The triangle sounds. A wave made of hands and feet comes from behind the cubes to the centre of the stage. Three dancers get on an imaginary plane, wave good-bye and take off. The others crouch, stretch their hands grabbing the ground, kiss it once and again, until we can't tell who is doing what. Eventually, all the dancers melt into a wave of embraces.

The guy smiles, relaxed.

**contact** [contacto@saludarte.org.uy](mailto:contacto@saludarte.org.uy) / **visit** [www.facebook.com/fundacion.saludarte.9](http://www.facebook.com/fundacion.saludarte.9)