



Above left: Puertas. Photo: Katti Borré. www.kattiborre.com. Above right: Inés Sanguinetti

Elasticity, porosity and flow

Inés Sanguinetti, dancer, founder of Crear vale la pena and social activist, describes her journey towards a passionate vision for the power of the arts to transform the world

This is a short voyage from my personal experience starting as a dancer, up to my current days as a political and social activist: oddly enough, I simply keep on dancing...

Dance is the expressive organisation of emotions within body, time and space. What really constitutes dancing is the liaison of our body with other bodies and space. When composing, choreographic creation does not take dancing space as an outer circumstance that can be treated separately. I am dancer, choreographer, sociologist, teacher and social activist. Space was a circumstance to create dance for stage as much as today underprivileged neighbourhoods are scenarios for improvising arts for social change in Argentina and Latin America.

How does dance work? Dancer's movement is a mechanism that sets in motion the audience's response. The so called 'poetic leap' refers to bodies confidently throwing themselves into a void as acrobats: dancers and spectators get hold of themselves in the air. Dance is registered by the audience through an empathic movement within the body, imperceptible through a still movement. A good dancer makes the audience move.

Experiencing organised emotions in our bodies moves dancers as much as spectators. From the human communication perspective, a body in movement necessarily relates as a metaphor to the political body. (1) Body is traversed by its circumstance. Dance is an in-out continuity principle that conveys our physical experience of life as an affair with ourselves, others, nature, transcendency. Namely, our body unfailingly expresses the political positioning of our own culture, facing time and space. From classical dance to hip hop, our dance patterns are shaping and naming our way

of being as cultural bodies.

Our good and evil representations, our common culture, are the scriptwriters of our daily movements so much so as our so called 'personality'. Additionally, the hegemonic cultural system we belong to is certainly the great choreographer that has designed the scheme where our psyche – its choreographer assistant – creates body and space movements that are unable to modify the structure of the pre-defined scheme.

Nevertheless, the body is a biological as much as a cultural project. Thus, it has the possibility of being something completely different from what it is. (2) What sort of relationship could be established with society, if dance were to conform a new political body? How can a body in movement modify political, social and cultural relationships? Would bodies, as biological-cultural projects, change? Could bodies be transformed by new social interactions? And if they were, could they choose to move differently, transforming themselves to trigger social and cultural change in their environment?

In order to answer these questions I moved my dance performing room to an extremely poor neighbourhood outside Buenos Aires, La Cava, where I founded together with Juan Peña (who contributed the educational perspective) Crear vale la pena (CVLP), a socio-cultural organisation.

La Cava is built at the bottom of an ancient quarry. Living there means lack of water, energy, streets, sewerage. Houses are shameful and are connected through narrow corridors. A thin wall separates it from a very rich neighbourhood.

From my personal perspective, art is a liaison. This enhances its singleness. Therefore, could we possibly

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create and generate liaisons that may contribute to modify this picture? As long as we think of art as sensuality, melting, excessiveness, a plus of life and we start being moved by all this, we might be transforming the wall into something with elasticity, porosity and flow enough to guarantee beauty on both sides. Artists could pull down this wall if they realise that the border is not a wall but a workshop or an artistic creation.

What has art to say about life in cities? How do actor/dancer/musicians' and spectators' experiences link to common citizens' knowledge? In which way could art be useful in making public city spaces more democratic? When looking for 'new' feelings, choreographers are extremely selective. What would they do if they were looking for other people's welfare? There are artists who discovered the new artistic territories as an impulse to produce new political languages.

Even if modern dance has always been pushing borders forward towards a dazzling and wonderful adventure, it has often avoided jumping over the walls that neglect human rights.

But we can certainly make the leap! When I started dancing, mainstream competition meant longing to jump from Argentine stages into European ones or to main international festivals. In a very contradictory way, I gave the best of me to be appreciated in an up-side-down world. What else was expected from that 'avant-garde' energy?

CVLP expressed my will to assume, shyly and in community, that I belonged to the decade that fought to set

the basis for a new world. Revolutionary modern artists from the 70s! From then onwards, I stopped trying to overdo my artistic career, based on my participation on international festivals, stages and critiques.

During the past 16 years CVLP developed professional and non-professional Training Cultural Centres for thousands of young people who lacked all sorts of opportunities. Aimed at reversing social exclusion in one of the most underprivileged neighbourhoods of Greater Buenos Aires, the institutional strategy carried out by the internal team, was called Art and Social Organisation. Working against a traditional position that states that poor people should provide individual solutions to their social problems, CVLP generated a community proposal based on artistic education and production together with social community organisation. The combination of these three factors proved to be successful in protecting personal life stories and in achieving community solutions and relief to great suffering caused by poverty. Nowadays, many of said young people are outstanding dancers, share dance tours and work in the movies, while 80% of our community centre teaching is done by our programme training teams.

Another key element of the transformation strategy was the beginning of alliances between people from inside and outside La Cava (schools, health centres and local authorities, training artists, teachers, community workers, government officials). Training was directly oriented to help them design, coordinate and implement artistic programmes for social transformation at each particular level: from the classroom to



Puertas. Photo: Katti Borré. www.kattiborre.com

the school, from the workshop to the whole community. This gave birth to a particularly strong social network, made social capital grow and improved everyone's wellbeing.

At CVLP we are convinced of the power of these alliances. For instance, we now give weekly workshops for more than 450 young people and adults in collaboration with the social integration area of our Town Hall Government. At Buenos Aires city level, the ABC Programme (arts, creativity and wellbeing for the community) addressed to 15 public schools and 2,000 students, is a cooperation among Buenos Aires city, its Government, the University of Aberdeen in Scotland and the University of St. Andrews in Argentina. While introducing arts in the learning process, the objective is to train peer teaching couples (artist and teacher) from schools in both cities in order to optimise students' and teachers' capacities throughout the school period. Creative activity in schools is a vital element in a holistic education respectful of diversity towards a cohesive society.

At a regional level, CVLP is a founding member of the Latin American Network for Art for Social Transformation created in 2005 and actually involving 11 countries in the region. Each member has a particular artistic methodology to generate social transformation and addresses a specific group of underprivileged citizens. But all of them are compelled to improve the lives of every member of their communities through a creative and high quality artistic expression. Dance, music, circus, theatre, painting, all languages are suitable to develop citizenship, to prevent school violence, improve health conditions, take care of the environment, and to address any other social need abandoned by the corresponding authorities.

Through workshops, festivals and cultural events that impact on a broader audience beyond the immediate community, the Latin American Network for Social Transformation helped its members to work together, sharing methods of creating social transformation and impulsing the generation of new public policies. Once more, elasticity, porosity and flow are key elements that help these varied organisations to work together.

The Latin American Network eventually came across other regional and collective movements which shared flexibility, values and visions. Under the guidance of Brazilian new culture polices, a new Platform of Live Community Culture and the Programme of Points of Culture, started growing across the region. (3)

What is this public policy achieving? The Live Community Culture and Points of Culture Programme is an answer to the growing movements from the underprivileged sectors demanding recognition of their rights and power as much as a transformation of the established status. It is a concept and a theory of autonomy and sociocultural leaderships. It is a concept that implies moving beyond the restriction of attributing art to the elites and craft to the people. The Points of Culture surpass the mere artistic or aesthetic act and concentrate on the ethical dimension, on the

commitment to people. Talking about transforming and socialised management at the Point of Culture level, results in new management and more democratic parameters in the relationship between State and Society. State does not impose a cultural programme, but asks people what they need. Instead of understanding culture as a product, it is recognised as a process.

Currently, this exemplary policy is being impulsed in different Latin American countries, at various political levels. Medellín in Colombia, Buenos Aires in Argentina, La Paz in Bolivia, are just a few examples of its spreading across LA. The campaign is actually running in 11 countries with a common strategy worked out in annual meetings and unique for the Latinamerican history.

So, starting by stretching my body towards another one in a rehearsal space, crossing lines, looking for osmosis and porosity with other minds and bodies and ending in the construction of the right dramaturgy of an artistic and political movement, was one simple and continuous movement lasting 30 years. Our art creations may inspire hope, but their strength is also their vulnerability. Starting from the body, art brings openness through constantly breaking internal and external boundaries.

Since reason is embodied and will is reason applied to action, lets think that if we can bring together within ourselves, inside our unique body, feeling, thinking and doing, consistency of wellbeing and human rights will be accomplished soon. To create the new world with others we need the same flexible and reflexive competences we need to choreograph.(4) Politics demand an artful practice of life. Lets go for it!

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(1) "The fundamental role of metaphor is to project inference patterns from the source domain to the target domain" (Philosophy in the flesh, Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson, 1999)

(2) "The way we conceptualise the world, does not depend primarily on propositions or words, but rather on our corporal activity patterns" (Philosophy in the flesh, Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson, 1999)

(3) Under President Lula's Government, the Cultural Ministry passed a National Points of Culture Policy oriented to 'un-hide' the multiple Brazilian cultural expressions developed at bottom level. The Policy meant to invest 0.1% of the National Cultural budget in local cultural organisations, acknowledging the power of diversity, of grass-root experience and creativity

(4) "Reason and conceptual structure are shaped by our bodies, brains, and modes of functioning in the world. Reason and concepts are therefore not transcendent, that is, not utterly independent of the body" (Philosophy in the flesh, Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson, 1999)