



New Masculinities: An Actor's Lecture¹

Carlos Satizábal²

Translation: Carlos González-Vio³

On stage there is a table with a pitcher of water and an empty glass. To one side of the table there is a chair facing the audience. Carlos enters. He is dressed casually and is carrying a shoulder bag. He sets the bag on the table, takes out some papers and places them on the table. He places the bag to one side of the chair.

CARLOS: Good morning. (*He sits, clears his throat. He pours some water, drinks it*). I am here to talk to you about new masculinities. This is a reading. A reading about how as men, we can challenge ourselves to find another masculinity. That is to say, to confront our own inner macho. I am an actor. Carlos González-Vio. Carlos. Carlos Satizábal, a friend and colleague from Bogotá, was meant to take part in this conference. But he's not here. I am here in his place. But I have his words. He gave them to me. To translate. So...here I am, to read, as an actor, his conference. He left it written, here, in these pages...for me to read to you.

He drinks water.

Carlos told me:

"Listen, Carlos, a conference about new masculinities, I couldn't...I'm a man, after all. One cannot speak of what one does not know. Not even acting. Though acting, perhaps. When it comes to art one doesn't need to know everything. Picasso said: 'If you already know what you're going to do, then, why do you it?'"

That's what he told me. I agree. In creation when one knows so much there is no invention. In art, a person explores what they don't know, the unknown: through the imagination, invention. I'll do that. As an actor. Through this reading, with references, to the conference in these pages written by Carlos Satizábal.

He drinks water.

1 North American Premiere at Aluna Theatre's Pan-American Routes / Rutas Panamericanas Festival May 25, 2012, Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto. Direction: Carlos Satizábal. Acting: Carlos Gonzalez-Vio and Nicola Correia-Damude

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3 Carlos González-Vio began his theatre training in 2001 at Equity Showcase Theatre with Kevin McCormick, among others. Since then, his work has taken him from Toronto to Buenos Aires, Prague, Havana and Bogotá. With a strange stint south of St. Louis somewhere in there. Stage credits include: Nohayquiensepa (Aluna Theatre), Hallaj (Modern Times Stage Company), Elora Gorge (The Room), La Comunión (Aluna Theatre), Agamemnon (Theatre CIPHER), Crave (Nightwood Theatre), Endings (PassBo Dance) and The Epic of Gilgamesh, (Groundwater Productions). Screen credits include: Nikita, XIII, Flashpoint and the up-coming Cracked (CBC).

Fully bilingual, Carlos has been able to support fellow artists in their translating and subtitling needs in the past. In 2012, as part of Panamerican Routes/Rutas Panamericanas, Carlos translated (and performed) "New Masculinities" an essay by Colombian poet and playwright, Carlos Satizábal. In 2011, Carlos translated "Lukumi and the Magic Stone" a children's play by Cuban author, Simon Casanova. From 2006-2008 he assisted as a subtitles editor for Alucine, an experimental film and video festival that receives submissions from all over the world, including the vast Spanish-speaking regions. Carlos is currently collaborating on the development of "Conservación de Cortazar", an adaptation experiment and will continue this work with the support of Aluna Theatre in 2013.

Says:

Let's draw some parallels. Between our training as actors, and the silent cultural training boys receive to become men. How in theatre, and in life, our bodies, eyes, voice and storytelling are moulded to assume a role or a character: a man, a woman.

As an actor, one needs to ask what it is to be a woman, and what it is to be a man. What it is to be someone else. As actors, we are tasked with being other people. That's what we do on stage: in theatre. We are other people. We are men or we are women. A new masculinity is capable of inhabiting a body that wasn't born a male. In fact, oneself could be a new masculinity. Despite not knowing so well how...But best that I speak about theatre and through that the topic: the masculinities.

In theatre the first thing is the eyes. To learn to look. To look clearly, precisely. If your eyes are everywhere...it doesn't work. It works, sure, to give nervous looks, shifty: for example, a bad thief. A novice thief.

He imitates a novice thief who clumsily fails to steal a pen off the desk.

But a good thief, a professional, gives nothing away. Takes things as though they're his.

Now he imitates a professional thief who swipes it and puts it behind his ear, he sits down, crossing his legs with a smile.

The firm gaze, the furtive gaze, vague, elusive, nervous... We learn them before we become actors. As children, boys learn from watching the grown-ups, how the men undress a beautiful woman that walks into the room. Or a girl, becoming a woman.

*He pretends to look at a girl and gazes at her lasciviously, violating her.
He drinks water.*

As children we learn that look, the look that undresses with the eyes, the eyes of the violator. To achieve that look, we wait, patiently, for women to get dressed. The eye of the mirror with a man's voice into which the Snow White's Evil Step-Mother wonders: "Magic mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? "Snow White". He says.

King Oedipus ripped his eyes out because he knew that it's all in the eyes. Maybe he had an extra eye... King Oedipus killed his father and had daughters and sons with his own mother. Unknowingly, sure...but, his children were also his siblings. That's crazy...

How do you act that character? How do you create that person?

He drinks water.

It's all in the eyes. The lecherous look of the violator, the rapist, we learn it as children.

Absolutely, we learn to undress, with our eyes, those girls soon-to be-women. These eyes, these looks, they gnaw at dreams, they evaporate our desire, our love... Sometimes, when I find myself seeing through those eyes... I want to pounce on them, my eyes, and rip them out so that I can see inside them.

He mimes ripping out his eyes with his hands and looks at them.

Analyze the pupil, the fragile sense of humour, the diminutive veins that carve their way in the whites of the eyes, the unnerving nerves that connect the eyes with desire, the brain, the blood. The eyes are the soft organs closest to the brain. 2cm. away. The ear is also quite close, but more-so the eye. For that same reason, it's more risky to get a bullet in the eye than in the ear. But what I want to see is my eyes on the inside and understand what this look that undresses looks like.

The violator looks at her again.

That look: the macho, the rapist. From that first gesture that violently undresses, intimidates and violates with a stare, it's a slippery slope for that macho into verbal aggression, insults, humiliation and physical violence. Beating. To threaten injury, pain, death. Weapons. And to confront whomever eyes his conquests, the sexual properties of the violent, whomever seems to desire, with those same lascivious eyes, at the women that the macho thinks of as his; his property, his woman, his bitch.

He pounds the table, gets up and moves towards the enemy first, knife in hand.

In character:

“What?! What the fuck you think you’re looking at, punk?! You like? ha? Motherfucker?! (Blade). Here! So that your pussy-ass learns to respect another man’s woman...”

He stabs him into corpse pose, knife in hand, he turns to her...

And you? What's with that dress, showing your...go put a fucking sweater on!

He breaks the character, sits and drinks some water.

The look is the first thing that needs to go, in terms of what we learn- as children- it is to be a man. To find a new masculinity, those eyes have to be ripped out: those eyes with the look of a rapist.

And it's strange, like I said before, the gaze is one of the basics of acting, to attempt to become one who one is not. To pretend that I am not me but someone else, there's a sharp switch inside and I am Sharif, Mebbs, b., Claudio perseguido, or any other character I've ever played. I see through my eyes but with a different look, different from how I usually look. I see the

world through that character. Because in theatre, I lend my eyes and my body to give life to that character.

“Porque cuando yo veo las correas de las valijas, es como si viera sombras, elementos de un látigo que me azota indirectamente, de la manera más sutil y más horrible.”

That's from a letter that a Julio Cortázar character writes to a young lady in Paris. He's describing Thursday, day one: the move into her flat that he's sitting while she's out of town and how when he sees luggage straps he sees shadows, elements of a whip that flog him indirectly in the most subtle and horrible manner. And that's how his particular eyes see and therefore his very particular body react to living in his world full of shadows.

I'd like to reiterate, the way we see and look is essential in acting, but also in the new masculinities: to become a new man we must tear the violence out from our eyes.

He drinks water. He gazes, thinks.

The Body, that's another essential study in theatre. How does the body walk, how does the body move, how does the body sit, how does the body relish and desire? How does the body climax? How does the body give birth? How does the body nourish and give life to another body?

The body and the positions of the body are cultural designs. How to sit, how to stand, how to walk, how to relate to nature, to others; how to enjoy, how to give birth... These are cultural designs.

The body is designed by our culture. The body being a key question for an actor; a modern man should also ask himself the question in the interest of an alternative masculinity, the man with another gaze, another body. I ask myself, as an actor, as a profession: how do I become another man? How does that man look and see? How does he move? Does he move? What does all this mean? But we rarely ask ourselves this question, as a personal question, as a man: how does Carlos look? How do I, this Carlos, look and see and move? That is to say: Can I see as a modern man, a new man? Myself as someone else. Not me with the eyes of an intruder that were designed in my childhood. But rather me, with different eyes. Me-other. It's only now, that this conference has asked me the question...that I ask myself..

In a study at the University of Colombia, they asked approximately one thousand men “What does it mean to you to be a man?” And the majority answered immediately with a simple gesture:

He stands up, points to his crotch, looks at it.. Breaks the gesture, sits and drinks water.

The voice is another aspect that we study in theatre. We invent exercises to discover the voices within our voice. For example: the voice of an animal: a dog: woof! A cat: meow. A sheep: baaa.

Or the breath of an asthmatic. (*He imitates an asthmatic breathing with difficulty*).

In these games of imitation, one discovers that the most important, the most direct form of communication is the intention and the feeling. A dog baying at the moon. (*He howls*).

Or to speak in an invented language, one that appropriates the musicality of an existing tongue: Chinese or Japanese. And to do it as a soldier or a samurai:

He stands up and speaks in gibberish but with the cadence, rhythm and physicality of a Japanese Samurai.

For an actor, above all else, is the subtext: that which lies in the intention and intonation of the voice:

He spins and converts into the character of an abusive husband.

“Where’s my dinner?”

He mimes eating from a plate. He spits it out.

“This is cold!”

He throws the plate to the ground. Drinks water.

Here, it’s irrelevant whether this character is hungry or not. What matters is what is behind his words. It’s all in the intonation of the voice.

The myth: there is a myth in which our corporal culture is founded, the book of Genesis: Adam the believer and Eve the disobedient. This myth contains the deep roots of our corporal design: of a painful birth, of slave labour, of love as control and the looting of mother nature.

To the woman He said:

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. “

That’s what God said to Eve in Genesis 3:20. He converts the gift and pleasure of giving life and the desires of love into curses that she must slave over. These curses are the mythical curses through which our patriarchal culture thrives, in them are written the tragedies and penances of our civilization: the penance of not understanding the languages of nature. This is key, because one, as an actor, knows that it’s all in the songs and the tone of the voice.

He drinks water. Gazes, thinks.

Throughout this next section, he reads from the page without lifting his eyes.

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe”. However, there are cultures in which childbearing is not severely painful. There are studies, in fact, that in a childbirth that is not so severely painful, a deep orgasm can occur: an orgasm of the uterus, a profound orgasm.

The sexuality of the female body is very different from the sexuality of the male body. As men, we don't know what it is to have an orgasm immediately after another; how to achieve a cascading orgasm, ceaseless, multiple, unstoppable. An unimaginable pleasure. But there are many women who orgasm this way, almost endlessly. And they give birth with pleasure, a pleasurable experience for the uterus, orgasmic. As a man, this, needs to be known. And above all, understood. The female body is multi-orgasmic. It is this that provokes hatred towards women.

Pause.

We've researched this that I am talking about, in feminist literature and through personal experience. I recommend, *Pariremos con Placer* (We will birth with Pleasure), by Casilda Rodríguez. She has a website. Many websites promote her work and speak at great and clear length about this topic. The penance of women to give birth through severe pain is a central manifestation of hatred towards women, of the fear of the multi-orgasmic female body, the fear of their uterine potential, of the complexity and depth of their pleasure. The mono-theological patriarchal myth in the book of Genesis exists to control and oppress the female body: “I will make your childbearing pains very severe.” The patriarchal culture has also imposed some normal positions of the body: the way we walk, the way we sit. Many indigenous cultures don't sit the way we do in our culture, in these seats so high up from the ground, that make us sit up straight. They have tiny little seats that make the knees go well above the hips. Like this.

He sits 25cm from the ground, his legs open.

A woman in this position would have a relaxed uterus. Her hips would be much stronger and broader and her spine would be straight and relaxed at the same time. But here, in our culture, women are taught as young girls to sit with their legs closed, squeezed tight: “sit properly, young lady, they'll get the wrong idea”, you hear the matriarch say to the young girl playing while seated on the floor. Here, if a woman squats or sits with her legs open, her womb relaxed, she would be called provocative, indecent. But if a man sits this way; it's normal. It's macho. Women are forced to sit with their legs closed and their abdomen tense, so that her uterus will tense up and cramp. To avoid deep, profound orgasms. To control their bodies. So that they're childbearing will be severely painful with violent contractions and spasms.

He drinks water.

We are also taught how not to breathe with our entire body. We unlearn the way we breathed from the uterus, how we breathed as babies. As adults we learn to breathe only with the top part of our lungs. Keeping the tension in the lower body. Also, we must have a flat stomach, to

be beautiful women and men, to be desirable. An abdomen that is not flat and tight is undesirable.

Were my friend here to say this, he could illustrate it more...

He outlines a stomach bigger than his own with his hands.

For me, this has been an integral discovery. Primarily, because I am an actor and in theatre I work with women who are also actors. In theatre, men and women train and stretch to relax the body, to broaden our mid-section, our stance, of different depths of breath. Secondly, because I have had to play a woman on stage before. Once, I played Clytemnestra in Agamemnon. In playing a woman, being a man, the biggest challenge is the physicality. The physicality that informs the character.

He speaks to a man in the audience.

Sir, imagine if you had to play a woman, a feminine character, feminine but not a caricature, or a parody but rather play a real woman, a real person...you, one, a woman... It's very difficult. In one of the traditional forms of Japanese acting styles, that is the most challenging part for an actor and requires the most training: to be a woman, an Onnagata: the actor that plays a woman. Onnagatas play the women because in Japanese theatre, women cannot act. Just like ancient Greece. Clytemnestra was played by a man then too, for very different reasons than why I did it. Antigone. Medea, Cassandra, all of them were played by male actors. Always.

In ancient Greece, women weren't even allowed into the theatre to watch the women being played by men. They just needed to be beautiful, silent and obedient.

He drinks water.

The depreciation of women is also something that we learn and witness from childhood in our children's books, stories that later become archetypes for stories that we see later in the theatre, on television and in movies. We mentioned before the magic mirror in Snow White. Now, let's take a look at Little Red Riding Hood's journey. "Take this cake and honey to your grandmother and don't talk to anyone on the way." But in the first crossroads for Little Red Riding Hood, she finds the big bad wolf, and just like Eve, the disobedient, red riding hood disobeys. And the big bad wolf tricks her: "This is the long way you're on, I'll teach you a short-cut." The wolf goes ahead and eats the grandmother. It's strange that the grandmother doesn't recognize her own granddaughter's voice. But we can suppose that the big bad wolf is a fine actor because he later tricks red riding hood again: "What big eyes you have. "So I can see you better". "What a big mouth and teeth you have". "To eat you better". And he eats her. Now we need the woodsman to show up, the strong man, equipped with his axe, his weapon, so he can open the big bad wolf's gut that digestively naps on his dinner of the grandmother and granddaughter together, and save them.

Like prince charming in Snow White. And Cinderella. Sleeping Beauty too. All the good little girls in these stories, the princesses who are poorly treated, need a man to protect them, to save them. The good girls of the world can be tricked by whatever wolf or witch can deceive them. They are gullible, naive. That's what these stories teach them as children. Quite the opposite of what is said about boys: David beats Goliath, saves the town and becomes a hero.

These cultural patrimonies of the beautiful naive girl for whom we prepare our masculine voice and eyes must be denounced, abolished. The theatre that we create aims to undress these structures of power and violence, it aims to unveil the misery within that structure. For example: exposing ourselves to the misogyny and violence, articulating their hatred and madness.

He points to the stage, preparing the scene ahead.

In La Pasarela, a collective creation about violence against women, directed by Patricia Ariza, I play such a character.

He takes off his shirt, revealing a bare chest. He puts on dark sunglasses, acting like a "man", fist in hand.

"She'll be back, she deserved it, she knows, she knows she was asking for it, she likes it, but she'll be back. Wait and see."

He breaks from the character. He wipes the scene away with his hand.

The macho, as a character, articulating his structure of misery. I would like to think that this character and I have nothing in common. Certainly not that, fist in hand. Threatening and oppressing with a violent fist. No. But what about what's behind his words and gestures?

Pause.

My partner, of course, has nothing in common with the woman that this character was talking about. She's an actor as well. And together, we take care of a beautiful baby girl: Selva. This is her photo. Take a look.

*He hands a picture of the baby to an audience member in the front row.
Pass it around.*

She's very beautiful. When she was born, my friend, Carlos Satizábal, the one who was meant to speak at this conference, suggested that lovely name. Selva. It means jungle in Spanish. And he recited to my partner, Selvita's mom, a few lines from Dante: "Questa selva selvaggia e aspra e forte que en el pensiero rinuova la pavura".

We named her Selva, the name of nature, of wilderness.

Well, with that, I am nearing the end.

Excuse me...un tinto, a coffee, en Colombia they call black coffee, tinto. In Uruguay, that's what we call red wine.

He reaches into the bag and takes out a thermos full of coffee.

My lady, Nicola, Selvita's mother, made my coffee this morning. We all call her Nikki, but that's short for Nicola.

He pours coffee into a cup and takes a sip.

Damn, it's cold. And it tastes like...but hey, it's coffee.
Any one wants some? I brought more cups

He drinks.

I make it better. Stronger.
The coffee, of course.
I also change Selvita's diapers.

He serves more coffee.

He drinks.

Hmm... Becoming a father has shown me different dimensions of being a man, to enjoy a different masculinity.

I learned to enjoy the pleasure of changing my daughter's diapers, of playing with her, of bathing her...

He speaks of his daughter very emotionally, suddenly his voice begins to falter and his eyes swell up with tears of joy about to burst out

...of loving her, of taking her on walks, of watching her crawl around, of talking to her, of wondering what her first words will be. Of giving Nicola, her mother, my partner, time for herself. Of sharing with her the joy of educating and nourishing and being with her. With Selvita.

Nicola enters

NICOLA: Hi, sorry. Sorry to interrupt. It's your turn and I've got a meeting.

She puts a male nursing vest on him.

CARLOS: Coffee's great by the way.

NICOLA (To the audience): Sorry.

She exits.

She helps my body to transform to one that nourishes and gives life.

She comes back with the baby wrapped in a blanket, and a bottle which she gives to him so that he can get it ready for feeding. Nicola hands the baby to Carlos. He nuzzles her into his breast and waits to feel the relief of the connection. He exhales. Carlos and Nicola kiss goodbye and she exits apologizing to the audience again.

CARLOS: Well, as you can see, I should probably finish now. I was almost done though there were a few things left to cover other than the voice, the look, the body, the stories, but... say hi, Selvita. Being a father has revealed to me one of the most unique perspectives of the question of what it means to be a man. A modern man, a new man. Taking care of Selvita is a unique pleasure. Becoming a father has transformed me. It's a pleasure I wouldn't know how to describe in words, just like this, as you see, with my baby, right mi amor? This pleasure is undoubtedly part of the new masculinities. I learn to be a different father, a father that enjoys looking after his daughter...Well, thank you very much. We're gonna go now. Thank you. say bye, mi amor... Adiós.

They exit.