



## The Decolonization of the body: Throne Theater as a method

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<p><b>Name of Activity</b> The Decolonization of the body: Throne Theater as a method</p>	<p>Total time About 2 to 3 hours. For shorter workshops, one can start with a combination of stages 1, 5 and 8.</p>
<p><b>Overview</b> This method of exploring ways to decolonize the body is a task of understanding why we're inhibited and how to free ourselves becoming powerful bodies with many skills.</p>	<p><b>Materials/room</b> This could be conducted both indoors and outdoors.</p>
<p><b>Number of people</b> 6 to 30 participants</p>	<p><b>Target groups &amp; Age</b> Anyone</p>
<p><b>Learning outcomes</b> With the body workshop we try to realize a journey to oneself, to accept oneself, to love oneself, also with the gaze of the other. If you accept and love the other, you love yourself—all of this happens through exploring and letting the body take over the brain and control our thoughts and actions.</p>	

## **PART I: The background to the Method**

### *Educational philosophy:*

As I was walking across the street, Mercedes appeared, calling for me, gesticulating. Mercedes is Jasmani's mother who had been part of our theater group for a few months. The first thought that crossed my mind was that her son had committed some foolishness for which I was to be accused and convicted without the right of defense. I approached her, although I preferred to escape.

“Good morning, Doña Mercedes.”

“Hello Iván, I would like to tell you something about Jasmani.”

I smiled to myself.

“It is...” said the mother slowly “it's just that he has changed a lot lately and you see, little by little he changes us all in the family. You know, Iván, we people in the altiplano<sup>1</sup> are like stones, we never touch each other, we do not come close to one another. I don't know what you are doing in your theater, in your exercises; I know that you are doing strange things, because Jasmani came home one day and suddenly hugged us. And slowly we have started in the family to hug each other and now we are doing it a lot. I just wanted to say thank you Iván, because you and all of you gave us all these hugs.”

These words went directly to my heart not without pain and stopped my breathing. My eyes were drowning in my face, like every time when I tell this story, as it is right now.

Colonialism means every form of using and abusing of the other, or, which is the same, every theft of the other's lands, of the other's place, the other's time and the other's energy. In spite of 500 years of time, republican constitutions and new discourses, colonialism remains the biggest enemy of the body: a bulldozer that is driving above us again and again, that reminds us every day of our condition as inferior and historically denied persons. Because of this, decolonizing the body is a task of major strategic interest. Decolonized bodies, which furthermore are prepared for theater, are very powerful bodies with many skills: They are more sensitive, intelligent, movable. The preparation of actors is a big responsibility. It is not about forming personal egos, but leaders of another kind, collective, truly decolonized – not more colonizers.



## **PART II: The Method**

A workshop of Throne Theater includes these different stages:

- Warm up
- Relaxing
- Theatric languages
- Individual composition
- Composition in pairs and groups
- Relaxing
- Analysis
- The hug

An instructor leads the group through the different stages.

### *1. Warm up*

A series of exercises prepare the body for creation. The muscles, joints and parts of the body underlie a routine which the context forces on them and whose automatism they have to shake off. From this moment on, it is a rediscovery of the own body. If some movements cannot be carried out, these frontiers are signals from the body.

Example: Draw soft circular movements with different body parts, especially with the joints. Form circles, squares, triangles and



other figures with different body parts. Then you start dissociation, slowly: The knees move in circles, the hands in squares at the same time, and the head forms a triangle.

## 2. Relaxing

This part is a soft invitation to the head to let go its constant role as dictator over the body and to simply act upon ideas parallel to other body parts.

Example: Fantasy journey

We start lying on the floor, the eyes closed, the head is empty, everything happens slowly and softly. We are in an earthenware vessel and feel the moisture, the cold, water comes in, it is warm, then cold, then hot, the water rises and covers everything, we dive into it, keep our breath, we cross a tunnel and the arms are searching for an exit with exaggerated gestures. We find a way outside; becoming beings that we are not used to describe when we see ourselves in the mirror. This being gets in contact with its environment by using parts of the body, which we usually do not perceive as body. We invent kinds to touch, to feel, to see with other parts of the body, we go through other bodies just with micro movements. We travel with three invented movements into the remotest past. We can do the same with the future or geographically remote places – it is a spontaneous dramaturgy. In the end we come back to the vessel, we are reborn

and come back to life in the bodies that we have, but with a memory full of the previous experience.

### 3. Theatric languages

Different codes are used in theater, which connect diverse languages that are spoken on stage at the same time. We are not just talking about Western theater, but also Eastern forms. These languages are for example: scenery, light, color, make up, props, sound, music, movement, masks, costumes, voice, text, objects, space, monologue, dialogue, direction. The word reinvents itself when it becomes aware that it is just one of the many possibilities of the body.

Example: Experience the room: forward, backward, sideward, standing, crouching, lying with closed eyes. Recognize the room, dimension it with the body, experience clearness in expansion, in smallness. Make movements with parts of the body that you never use.

### 4. *Individual composition*

Bodies are filters of the collective. Now, the participants look into the other in themselves. This connection is crucial, because commitment for the community is just this, an alliance with the complementary other.

Example: Every person invents three very logical phrases (e.g. A tree is high.) and they are said loudly for collective listening. After this, you invent three absurd phrases and say them (e.g. A tree loves fish). Finally, use phrases that are totally disconnected, senseless, that do not say anything and therefore say a lot (e.g. A tree jumps red). This sequence should be repeated with the same logic but this time with the bodies, without words. And finally, combining movements and phrases.

### 5. *Composition in pairs and groups*

What is valid for the individual, obtains a higher creative level in interaction in pairs or groups. This is based on the most important technique for collective creation: improvisation. To look at each other, touch and contact are the basis for this. It needs a lot of patience because the bodies resist the approach, as we are not used to closeness. And when it exists, it is often distorted as lustful explosion. Closeness has to happen gradually. Keeping the eye contact, the other is you. Learn the contact gently, full of

respect – this lets the body creak and contract rifts. At this point we experience the slow step to confidence uncountable times, where the libido takes a passive place. Together, we open the body: the hinges of a door creak because of the many repetitions of its work. Encrustation because of the mechanical repetition: this happens also with our body physically, emotionally and mentally. Accumulated automatisms make the joints creak because of gathered fear. Bent backs, closed bodies, hanging heads – this is neither the cold nor the Andean nature, it is mainly fear.

Example: Someone says a word or a sentence (e.g. ocean) and everyone answers at the same time without interruption logical phrases (e.g. water is blue) that are connected to the above said. Then we open to absurd phrases (e.g. water is flying away) and in a third phase the pronunciation of the said should be stopped when the speaker notices that his or her sequence begins to be logical (e.g. water is...Stop! Participants should think of something NOT connected to 'ocean' as 'fire', stop when one starts connecting again (e.g. fire is hot), but everyone tries to keep on talking. Every logical connection must be destroyed. You will see how difficult but at the same time enriching for the body these kinds of tasks are. In the second round, the exercise is repeated with the body and after that, phrases and body movements are combined into what is incredible. A hidden dramaturgy comes out of the bodies.

## 6. *Relaxing*

Collective fantasy journey: Similar to the first relaxing exercise, but this time everyone is connected. It might be the hands or other body parts that symbolically join all participants. This journey should be more fantastical than before.

## 7. *Analysis*

This is a return to the speculation of the reason, to the head. Participants give back their emotions that support the learning and the preparation of the next meeting.

Example: Someone says a word or a sentence that was provoked by the workshop and everyone answers with logical sentences, then absurd sentences and finally, disconnected phrases. We explain our feelings in brief.

## 8. *The hug*

There is no more important celebration of the creative treaty than the hug. Close together, united, compressed, the bodies of two or

more persons become one. The collective hug in the end celebrates the daily revolution of the body.

With the body workshop we try to realize a journey to oneself, to accept oneself, to love oneself, also with the gaze of the other. If you accept and love the other, you love yourself. That is the denial of the prior colonial condition.

### Notes

1. The altiplano is a plateau of the Andes, which is located at 3600 to 4000 meters height in Western Bolivia.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Iván Nogales* is Bolivian and studied sociology. He has developed different initiatives in the field of community theatre and education since 1980. He has worked with peasants, miners, migrant women and street children. Based on these experiences, in 1989, he founded the Community of Art Producers, which is the base for Throne Theater.