



Towards a Theatre of Mystery Pere Sais

I propose a return to the Mystery (*Μυστήριον*), to a powerful theatre in action, when the act *was being done*, was being accomplished. It was not a simulation of action. It was Action (*δράσις*), Act; carnal and spiritual (*πνευματικός*) at a time, total.

I'm thinking of a "Theatre of Mystery", of what was or might have been the ancient "Mysteric Drama", as a return to the source, to the origin, to that unknown common root between theatre and ritual: to that primary performative act: recalled Act, reincarnated and "re-performed" here and now. [*Drama* has its roots in the verb *δρῶ* (*dro*); to do]

The Theatre of Mystery indicates and evokes, as the oracle does. It does not create an illusion, it does not "represent" nor "interpret"; it embodies a presence, as in the art of hagiography: the icon is not a "representation" of divinity, is not a totem that encloses it within itself; is the presence itself of divinity. The icon (the board with its pictoric composition) is a vehicle that exhales the divine. With no perspective. *Reverse perspective*: the observer does not "enter" the icon, but the presence of the divine comes to encounter him and involves him. The Theatre of Mystery is, in this sense, an "iconic art" and not "representational."

I'm thinking of a theatre not detached from the interiority of the human being and of the incarnation of that interiority through art. The less visible face of performing arts. A theatre as a "way of knowledge" of human being. This is not new, it has already existed, still exists and extends itself into the future.

The Art of Mystery is based on a "going back", not a sentimentalist or exotic going back, but a "recalling" in action, without releasing the present moment. From the present to the beginning; every moment is the beginning. *Breaking the connection between before and after* [Takuan]. Being in the beginning, because *where the beginning is, there the end will be too* (*Blessed is he who will stand at the beginning: and he will know the end, and he will no taste death*). Re-member, re-present, re-do, re-incarnate that primary Act, bare and essential, always the same and never the same, old and new at once, and it matters little whether it is called Theatre of Mystery, «Ritual Drama» or *art as a vehicle*.

I'm thinking of that going back to the first performative *doing*, to the ancient source of Action, to its first impulse. In this return to Theatre of Mystery we have our art (the craft) and "the heart" (the process linked to life, to our inner side); structure and freedom, discipline and spontaneity, shape and flow of life, exteriority and interiority. In this *conjunctio oppositorum* lies the secret of realization, of wholeness and integrity of the Work of art, and of ourselves, of our being –our presence– in it. Any technique, any training, any ascesis, any approach is only a "means" with no value of itself as a goal. When mastery has been reached, we must transcend technique and face the heart and the spirit. What we are looking for in all this is a sense in our existence, we try to fill the emptiness through our "poor" artistic means, through the *praxis* of our craft. The performative art –art of action *par excellence*– is our vehicle –as the icon is of the divine presence– in order to approach the source itself of that "something" that is above and at the same time inside us –we can call it life, God, Void or "vast space"– however it's pulsation, rhythm, dance, chant, spirit, *logos* ...

Our Theatre of Mystery, from the carnal, the corporal, becomes prayer, yoga, prayer of action and in action. We build craftly our ladder to the subtle, step by step, from our biological and carnal condition, in a search for wholeness, being embraced in us the archaic and instinctive with the consciousness, which is our potential aspect as human beings. The body of the *doer* becomes, then, a refinery that converts the dense, and heavy into something subtle and light. Outer Liturgy (Action) and inner liturgy (passage towards the subtle), as two itineraries that form the Opus, amalgamate. In this *Mystery* a primary act of the prayer of the action is accomplished and culminated.

In an art like this, the actor is *doer*; does not simulate, does not play, does not “show” himself, does not lie nor does he lie to himself; he's him, "Man," at the same time *artifex* and *pontifex*.

*Upon the river the shining moon, in the pine-trees the wind that sighs;
all night so quiet: Why? For what? [Hsüan-Chüeh]*

He is committed, unveils and offers himself, reveals himself completely without intending to. Abandones himself to the process through non-resistance. Looks for knowledge without looking for it. Here we do not add, we remove. This is an apophatic way – a way of negation– and not a cataphatic one. As St. John of the Cross says, *If you want to come to the holy withdrawal, you have not come admitting, but denying.*

*To come to what you do not know,
you must go by a way which you do not know.
To come to what you are not,
you must go by a way in which you are not.*

Philokalia of the hesychast actor

The *doer* is a “contemplative Man in action”. He is neptic (vigilant) and hesychast (sober). The *doer* “reveals” himself –very different from showing himself in a narcissistic sense– and, through him, “reveals” something which is both in him, inside him, like a flame, and out of himself. He “serves”:

Deny yourself and with your art "serve"; to whatever you want; to the other, to the vertical otherness [God], to your craft, but "serve". With your art and practice you are artifex, “serving” you are pontifex. If you lack mastery in craft, you cannot face the ways of the heart, if you lack heart, your art is empty and has no soul.

The *work on oneself* is, at the same time, *to know yourself* and "to know your craft"; apprenticeship of being and of doing. The craftsman of action works on himself and "discovers" himself in the doing. What is your doing? What is the art that allows you to enter into a process towards wholeness? That is, what is the "doing" with which you are acceding to your body, your heart, your mind, your soul, your spirit, your psyche, to the whole of you, to your Presence? What keeps the flame of your organicity, your soul, your life, lit? Art and the human issue are the two sides of the same coin. The dynamic balance between action –manifested in their outer form– and inner process leads to the Grand Act.

The actor-*doer* is the warrior of the action and the swordsman of the presence. He

must acquire his mastery in action –doing– and in presence –being. The morpheme of his art, the essential particle, is the impulse. Not only the physical one, but also that one rooted in life experiences, in individual and ancestral memory, in the deep inner world that is incarnated in the body; the impulse is a mystery.

The impulse is the pre-action, something like a potential pulsation that is inside the body, comes out of it and expands as a stream outwards. The action is the prolongation of the impulse and its materialization in an articulated form that tends outwards and is visible from the outside. The impulse is always linked to the "contact with", to the intention, not in the sense of mental manipulation, but as a "tending towards" something or someone (In-tention). It is a connection: with the other or "that other", with what may not be there in flesh and blood but, somehow, is there incarnated, present somewhere in the space, somewhere within us. That "something" may have been or will be there. Impulse is "contact".

When the flow of impulses/actions (and their tempo-rhythm) is precise and articulated, something dances: dance of the presence linked to "something", to "an-other". Always the other: *If you're not yet brother you are not yet man*, says Vicente Ferrer. When "I" becomes "You" and I-Thou becomes "We".

In the Theatre of Mystery the doer develops a vigilant awareness in action, expanded and subtle levels of perception. His "look" is a "watching", triple and single at a time: contemplates the surrounding environment, his own interior (proprioception) and what is above him and greater than him (the vast space.) To see and to watch at the same time, as the silent witness who testifies everything without "seizing" it, without "grabbing" it. Every "object", inner or outer, moves and flows into the "spaciousness" that contains everything. We are part of this flow, the flow of things, but this vast space "is", remains immutable.

When the action is accomplished becomes act; then the "wind" of repose, of transparent spaciousness, comes in waves and nourishes us. *What is the sign of your father in you? It is a movement and a repose.*

The word is act: incantation (in-chant-action). There is a way of "saying", of "in-chant" that makes the word body. Its form, its content, its action become one. Descent of the spirit from the mind (νοῦς) into the heart (καρδιά). Continuous prayer of the heart. Incarnation of *logos*. It is like an "affirmation" of the word: some words are the presence of its contents as sonic icons. In this "affirmation", the word (*logos*), through a precise intonation, is like the arrow that transcends the target, which goes "beyond" it. The "affirmative", "vertical" way of saying of the monks of Mount Athos singing his Byzantine chants is one of the maximum expressions of this "saying /in-chanting."

The path of action and chant, way of performer

An old aphorism says: *Nothing rests, everything moves, everything vibrates*. Universe and life are vibration. The soul moves in sound waves. It is said in some ancient writings that the universe was created through the sound of the voice and through the word (*logos*).

In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was made flesh.

The chant is vibration, therefore, life. It is the maximum expression of the *total act* of a human being. We deal with the “spatial-corporal resonance” because the chant-body (the song linked to the flow of living impulses) is the key of access the "chant-spirit."

The «ancient traditional chant of resonance», as a living device developed over many generations within the frame various ritual traditions, is *the cornerstone* of our way, our main tool. Its name is not limited to a single line of tradition, although in our case we focus on chants of Afro-Caribbean roots and Christian Greco-Byzantine. But these are only possibilities. There may be many others, this is a personal decision. We consider these chants as instruments which, because of their precise impacts in terms of energy-types – rooted in the sonic resonance and in the flow of living impulses–, can be used to do a *work on oneself*, as a kind of artistic yoga through chant rooted in a performative approach, in action.

The ancient traditional chant of resonance is like a very subtle sonic prism. It is composed externally of a precise melody, words and tempo-rhythm. Inside it contains, as hidden behind the melody, a "sonic-vibratory architecture" – like a *vibratory language*– and a “way of movement” (associated to the living impulses in the organism). All this encoded content is like the DNA of the chant. The discovery of the core of the chant (its "heart"), through a rigorous and precise way of doing, is the gateway to the vertical process of "inner passage" that each chant can produce in the one who is leading it. The doer is being elevated axially –as through a ladder, rung by rung– to subtlety. This passage is like a journey of ascension through the qualities of energy (energy understood as its qualities and not as quantity): the transition from the coarsest, our vital sphere, biological and instinctual, to the subtle, refined, transparent and luminous, and the posterior descent from that subtle quality to the physicality of the body.

The chant is a call to the soul, a path towards our development and wholeness as human beings. Chant is wholeness, ludic and bright plenitude. Chant is silent joy.

Our path is analogous to that of Miyamoto Musashi fencing. For him, fencing was art and something beyond art. This "beyond" art is what he found in other arts, in which he was also a master. Ours is a "way of performer" through chant: "path of chanted action". This is the compass of our ascension along the *narrow path* of our Monte Carmelo towards fullness. *Nothing nothing nothing. And even on the Mountain nothing. Void.*

Make the Void Way and consider the Way “void”.

Wisdom exists. Principles exist. Ways exist. But the spirit is “Void”. [Gorin No Sho]