

**Choreographing Social Manifestos:  
Dance-Theatre, Body, Identity and Semiotics in  
Ananda Dansa's *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida***

Olga Celda Real  
Dramaturg and Dramatic Translator  
(PhD Spanish and Spanish American Studies)  
King's College, University of London

**Abstract.** Notions of identity, dance-theatre, body, corporeality and sociocultural semiotics are the conceptual base found at the core of two seminal works by the Valencian dance company Ananda Dansa. The choreographies of *Crónica Civil V-36/39*<sup>1</sup> and *Toda una Vida*<sup>2</sup> interpreted the social and cultural forces in which they were envisaged and became unique experiences of sociocultural dance-theatre with no fixed referent. The characters embodied in the dancing bodies populating these productions are both, universal and anonymous. The stories they tell are about human relationships and their significance in a particular social, political and cultural world; and their discourse on violence, its consequences, and the making of self, convey cultural signs deeply ingrained in our cognitive understanding of past social action and interaction. In these works, our perception of dance as a one-dimensional art is erased by the impact of lasting historical and communicative memories still lingering in our sense of identity; consequently expanding our analytic perception of past reality. Hence, in *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida*, the basic significance of specific social context is central to our perception of the stories we are told. The performance of these spectacles becomes then, not just a simple assessment of a succession of dancing techniques and structured plot development, but it is transformed instead into a denouncement of the misgivings still embroidered in the identity of the Valencian citizens, corollary of the brutality of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's Regime. As such, in these two dance-theatre works, the intersection of disciplines produced a cultural product which moved beyond the long-held technical and aesthetic perceptions already established in the cultural field; delivering along the process a vision on historical and collective truth in the shape of choreographed social manifestos.

**Keywords.** Ananda Dansa, semiotics, identity, corporeality, dance-theatre, body, culture, social.

**Resumen.** Nociones de identidad, danza-teatro, cuerpo, corporealidad y semióticos socioculturales forman el núcleo de dos trabajos pivotaes de la compañía valenciana Ananda Dansa. Las coreografías de *Crónica Civil V-36/39* y de *Toda una Vida* interpretaron las fuerzas culturales y sociales en las que fueron creadas y se convirtieron en experiencias únicas socioculturales de danza-teatro sin referente fijo. Los personajes encarnados en los cuerpos de los

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Civil Chronicle V-36/39'.

<sup>2</sup> 'A Whole Life'.

bailarines que pueblan estas producciones son al mismo tiempo universales y anónimos. Las historias que cuentan tratan de las relaciones humanas y de su significado en un mundo social, político y cultural en particular; y su discurso acerca de la violencia, sus consecuencias y la construcción del ser, expresan signos culturales arraigados en nuestra comprensión cognitiva de interacción y acción social existente en el pasado. En estos trabajos, nuestra percepción de danza evaluada como un arte unidimensional es borrada debido al impacto de las memorias histórica y comunicativa que todavía queda en nuestra noción de identidad; consecuentemente extendiendo nuestra percepción analítica de realidad ya pasada. Así pues, en *Crónica Civil V-36/39* y en *Toda una Vida* el significado básico de un contexto social específico es fundamental para nuestra percepción de las historias que nos cuentan. La representación de estos espectáculos no se convierte solo en una evaluación de técnicas de danza sucesivas y de argumento dramático estructurado, sino que también se transforma en una denuncia de los recelos todavía bordados en la identidad de los ciudadanos valencianos; corolario de la brutalidad de la Guerra Civil y del Régimen de Franco. En estos dos trabajos de danza-teatro, la intersección de disciplinas produjo un producto cultural que iba más allá de las percepciones técnicas y estéticas arraigadas y establecidas en el campo cultural, produciendo a lo largo del proceso una visión de verdad histórica y colectiva en la forma de manifiestos sociales coreografiados.

**Palabras clave.** Ananda Dansa, semióticos, identidad, corporealidad, danza-teatro, cuerpo, cultura y social.

---

In *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, Simon Sheperd argues the enormous impact Feminism had in the way we see bodies and concludes it is difficult to fully codify a body as it is a 'lived experience'. However, he also admits 'any body will exceed any ideology'<sup>3</sup>. Performance analysis of dance in particular makes a case on how our visual perception of any artistic product is based on our capacity to recognize it and to acknowledge it as such. In an ever metamorphosing world, an objective art such as dance – classical dance in particular - has a tendency to reassure *habitus* and reinforce dispositions to recognized canons in an audience. However, modern dance, as a genre of performance art, often enacts rituals which contest archetypal visions of womanhood and masculinity, offering peripheral options on social identity to dancers of polarised biological gender (masculine/ feminine) and challenge the assumptions made by society's taken for granted adjudicated gender roles. Indeed, the introduction of modern dance and its bearing on feminist discourse changed the scope of movement perceived as a corporeal language with a recognized and shared vocabulary; amplifying body idiom, social perceptions, and audience's expectations. In this context, the body on stage becomes a highly complex social creation as age, gender, and movement are factors crafting the composite of the dancer enacting a character and functioning in a particular chronotopic social group.

---

<sup>3</sup> SHEPERD, Simon: *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p.72.

In the works of Ananda Dansa there is a tendency to de-construct the formalist look of dance, as the experimental research undertaken by the choreographer Rosángeles Valls and by director Édison Valls on body and spatial dynamics developed because of the wish to explore movement in context, particularly in social context. The experimental and socially compromised disposition adopted by the group allowed for an opportunity to build new idioms – both corporeal and imaginary- which could articulate the changing social, cultural, and political transformations Spain was experiencing since the death of Franco in 1975; whilst providing the audience with a new discourse on dance-theatre. This experimental journey placed the choreographer Rosángeles Valls among other dancers – such as Duncan, Humphrey, St. Denis, Fuller, Graham, Bausch or Durham – belonging to a group of female artists whom envisioned dance ‘as a democratic or communal nationalist art form’<sup>4</sup>. But it is the credence placed by Ananda Dansa on the capacity of human gesture to convey emotional meaning what makes this Delsartian approach a doxa. In *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida*, the discursively constituted body of the dancers avoided naturalistic definition and plunged into the spheres of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. As such, the uncompromised stance adopted by the group highlighted the prevalent role a human body possess in ‘making and remarking social life’<sup>5</sup>. Ananda Dansa anticipated radical sociocultural changes in thought and representation, presenting seminal works well ahead of their time. They are representative of the consolidation of the creative multidisciplinary artist, fighting free from the historical political sanitation imposed by decades of Francoist censorship on the cultural and social fields. The cultural contribution and the critical enquiry the productions of *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida* generated ensued because body movement and its semiotic activity have the capacity to engender - as Edna Okno argues – ‘revolutionary implications’. <sup>6</sup> Ananda Dansa’s exceptional capacity to re-create social worlds and to delineate bodies in space reflected the group’s ideological mapping and the conflictive political and social times both productions denounced. Yet, the group’s relationship with the past was not a task of nostalgia but an engaging exposure of what Lisa Jardine calls ‘the residue of history’<sup>7</sup>, as the dancers could articulate the intended message to a discerning audience in the shape of choreographed corporeal manifestos.

---

<sup>4</sup> BANES, Sally: *Dancing Women: Female Body on Stage*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.124.

<sup>5</sup> HOWSON, Alexandra: *the Body in Society. An Introduction*, Blackwell, Cambridge, 2007, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> FRANKO, Mark: *Dancing Modernism. Performing Politics*, Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana, 1995, p.27.

<sup>7</sup> JARDINE, Lisa: *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, Routledge, London, 1996, p.207.



*Crónica Civil V-36/39* (Photo:Ananda Dansa)

In *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida*, there was a combination of the analytical and the abstract forming unexpected visual body compositions, in which de-struction of real imaginary produced a re-enactment of a historical and social period suspended in time and memory. The emphasis on the social aspect of the themes explored by Anada Dansa visually delineated a chronotopic social picture achieved via the use of historical reality: in *Crónica Civil V-36/39* by placing a group of children playing together in Valencia during the time-frame of the Spanish Civil War, and in *Toda una Vida*, by way of offering the audience a beautifully crafted choreography on the deteriorating love and violence experienced by a couple during the apocalyptic early years of the dictatorship; encapsulated in Pep Llopis's mesmerising score, full of remembrance of songs and sounds past. In both productions, Ananda Dansa delivered a structuralist analysis on movement and rhythm, encircled by the careful composed and orchestrated music scores. The combination of musical landscape, particular use of metre, and exploration of dancing techniques, challenged our conceptual understanding of communicative memory, as the company proffered to the audience a slice of historical past to be shared, contested and –finally- understood as part of our reality of everyday life in

defined time and space. Hitherto, the dancers<sup>8</sup> in *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida* employed a corporeal vocabulary of social idiom enmeshed in 'cultural embodiment and cultural communication'<sup>9</sup>; a result of the explorative stance the group implemented at the core of its artistic products. This disposition endorsed the deliverance of these two uncompromised interdisciplinary works which distinguished themselves to the spectators through intentional reference to reality by means of semiotic activity. This activity endorsed a semiological route to the analysis of the performance, as the signs functioning between audience and dancers were essentially signifying construct. Thus, when Ananda Dansa employed an old photograph of two women and a baby as poster for *Toda una Vida*, the highly conventional portrait of what appears to be three generations of women from the same family is transformed into a definitive motivated sign functioning in chronotope.

Ananda Dansa  
presenta



Toda una Vida

Ananda Dansa shares with Durkheim a vision of the body understood as a single identity functioning in context. Indeed, our perception of the body is crafted by social, cultural, political and gender fields. Therefore, our discursive interpretation is definitively shaped by the meaning of the signs employed and

---

<sup>8</sup> *Crónica Civil V-36/3*: Irene Mira, Amparo Fernández, Ana Estremiana, Alicia Gómez, Rosa Ribes, Rosángelos Valls, Maribel Casany, Rafa Rodríguez, Gerardo Esteve, Rafael Calatayud, Carles Alfaro, Juli García, José Manuel Casany, Vicente Macías and Pepe Sobradelo.

*Toda una Vida*: Susana Rodrigo and Toni Aparisi.

<sup>9</sup> PARVIAINEN, Joanna: *Bodies Moving and Moved: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Dancing Subject and the Cognitive and Ethical Values of Dance Art*, Tampere University Press, Vammala, 1998, p.82.

in their ideological character. Also, in the denotative and cognitive proprieties characteristic of semiotic activity. The social mapping of the body and its relationship with the reproduction of society- and its inequalities- is something Bourdieu explained at length. To him, body movement is an enactment of social positions and dispositions, and it is intimately related to *habitus* and to the identity of the body (self) as a component of human agency. Consequently, we can argue the concepts of free expression and repression generally encompass a sense of collective social identity striving for social equality. In this context, when Bakhtin makes a case on the formation of social groups and groupings - placing them as the ensuing shaping force behind an agent's formative context- we identify the group of dancers on stage as signifieds, corporeal carriers of a crucial discourse on oppression belonging to a particular historical time. This is evident in *Toda una Vida*, wherein the two characters personal journey in time and precise space degenerates into a downward spiral of indifferent acts of violence executed upon the female identity, mirroring the dystopic domestic environment permitted by the Regime's repressive attitude to women rights in society at large. On contesting this historical slant, the group de-constructed the female body of the character as a passive element functioning in the fields, bequeathing on it a distinctive social significance.



*Toda una Vida* (Photo Jordi Pla)

If Bakhtin argues the formation of social groups and groupings in any culture and context (like the group of children playing in *Crónica Civil V-36/39* against the background of the war) is unstoppable; Bourdieu warns *habitus* is an array of several embodied dispositions which could, potentially, reproduce society *ad libitum*. Therefore, if *Crónica Civil V-36/39* deplored the pitiless loss of childhood because of war; the deteriorating relationship of the two characters in *Toda una Vida* denounced the historical and emotional legacy left by the brutal dismembering of social and ethical values triggered by the Spanish Civil War and its long-term consequences, allowing the audience to identify the two dancers on stage as social chronotopic identities. Per se, dance's contribution to this cycle of recognition - as a interdisciplinary art form-, occurs because it can express, in a subliminal but compromised way, changes happening in a particular historical era; choosing to either reproducing or interpreting them in precise time and space. In these two productions by Ananda Dansa, the final visual work asserted itself as the embodiment of cultural values 'resonating through the bodies that constitute them'<sup>10</sup>; the body itself becoming the showcase (a corporeal identity) wherein the social world was reproduced.

Chris Shilling upholds Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction as the force found at the core of 'the body seen as the bearer of symbolic value'<sup>11</sup>. Shilling takes this disposition even further claiming for Bourdieu 'the body itself enters into the production of the *habitus*', consequently 'shaping and being shaped by the structure of social fields'<sup>12</sup>. As such, the social characteristics engraved in the body of the dancers portrayed the characters as embodying not 'essences' of gender differential, but 'inscriptions'<sup>13</sup> of identity; this experimental approach, in itself, a variation of Foucault's theory of meaning. However, in both productions, it is Mary Douglas's anthropological view of the body seen as 'a receptor of social meaning and a symbol of society'<sup>14</sup> what made the body of the dancers objects of a particular social discourse and utterly constructed by it. In *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and in *Toda una Vida* the body moved beyond the boundaries of being a one-dimensional corporeal entity and became part of a contextualized process of identification and recognition. It became social. As such, the process of corporeality experimented by the dancers was indeed part of an historical process, as body representation and its understanding by an audience is altered as cultural transition develops and political changes occur within society.

In both productions, the body of the dancer progressed from being just a simple dimorphic phenomena and moved into the sphere of sociocultural semiotics. As part of this process, the dancing body on stage became a rationale of meaning, inhabiting an array of emotions and motions encapsulated in our semiotic

---

<sup>10</sup> COOPER ALBRIGHT, Ann: *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover NH, 1997, p.97.

<sup>11</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London, 2006, p.111.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.130.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.203.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.64.

spectrum, filled with contemporary and historical signifieds. In isolation, the social and cultural semiotic values found in *Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida* rested on our cognitive perception of the Spanish Civil War's social imaginary and in the role played by communicative memory, functioning in Spain since 1936 across all fields: political, cultural and so forth. In these two seminal works, the shared valency embodied in the dancers – a shared capacity to unify meaning - underlined Durkheim's postulate referring to systems of belief and knowledge as socially constructed. Certainly, in both choreographies, the prevalent mutual interaction between collective memory and semiotic systems functioning in the field delivered to the audience an array of physical bodies whose characters were, already, an ideological product. To achieve this proposal, Anada Dansa carefully situated the characters populating both productions in a recognizable historical context, enabling the audience to re-create a shared past in time and space and to identify it as such.



*Crónica Civil V-36/39* (Photo: Anada Dansa)

Historical context is essential to position the artistic products, evolution, creative process and disposition of Anada Dansa in the diverse fields (social, cultural, political) and to acknowledge how the breeding and accumulation of capital (cultural, social and economic) helped to shape the progression of the group as a representative cultural force of Valencian identity developed in the



midst of a historical evolutive process. Hitherto, Francoist dictatorship had implemented for nearly forty years a national identity moulded as equal to government identity, and fostered a rigid tendency to evaluate a variety of linguistic, cultural, and social differences existing in diverse of areas of the Peninsula as homogeneous, consequently repressing any form of cultural manifestation which did not comply with the Regime's unitary system. But after Franco's death, the abolition of censorship in 1978 and the sudden availability of institutional funding for artistic projects became pivotal factors contributing to the cultural explosion sweeping the Spain of the 1980s. In this effervescent milieu, rich in creativity and avid for artistic expression but economically patchy as the available funding had a tendency to dangerous fluctuation, the Valencian choreographer Rosángeles Valls – educated at the Conservatoire of Dance in Valencia and taught as a graduate in Paris by Michelle Cacouault – founded in 1981 the group Ananda Dansa. With limited institutionalised help, she put forward the première of *Dansa* - their first work - in 1982. It was in the course of this production when the creative team of Rosángeles Valls and Édison Valls was forged, initiating a collaborative exploration on the hybrid possibilities of dance-theatre as interdisciplinary art form which still is in force. Over the years, the experimental disposition of both artistic directors and their inquisitiveness crystallized into solid and compromised artistic deliverances which won global public and critical recognition, positioning Anada Dansa firmly on the cultural field and bestowing on the group an increasing symbolic power.

In 1986, fifty years after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Ananda Dansa marked the anniversary with a new work of dance-theatre which remembered and commemorated the role played by Valencia as capital of the Republic after the government left Madrid, and her position as a Republican city during the whole length of the conflict. A such, the use of 'V-36/39' as trope clearly identified the precise space (Valencia) and time (1936- 1939) wherein the action happened. In this compelling piece of dance-theatre the combination of 'main plot development, progression, counterpoint, fugues, repetition of *leitmotif* performed by a diversity of characters/instruments, distribution of materials in movement, like a symphonic composition'<sup>15</sup>, and use of the dancers' bodies as instrumental – like the stark simplicity achieved in the scenes wherein no music was employed and only the sound made by the feet of the dancers hitting the floor played synchronic musical sentences - constructed an imaginary musical landscape reminiscence of traditional Valencian dance; while the costumes of the dancers - variations of peasants' attire - built a visually identifiable collective identity saturated with symbolic value.

---

<sup>15</sup> 'desarrollo del tema principal, progresión, contrapunto, fugas, repeticiones del *leitmotiv* interpretado por diversos personajes/instrumentos, distribución del material en movimiento, como una composición sinfónica'.

SIRERA, Rodolf: «La Trayectoria: Crear desde Valencia», *Ananda Dansa del baile a la palabra veinticinco años en escena*, Ed. Remei Miralles and Josep Lluís Sirera, PUV University of Valencia, Valencia, 2007, p.34.



*Crónica Civil V-36/39* (Photo: José Alberto Fuentes)

The poem *Requerimientos*<sup>16</sup>, written by José Ballester in 1947, became the inspirational tale of lost innocence and the remains war behind the dramaturgy of this social and political choreography. The poem runs as follow:

*'I want a child who would tell me I was one. In his own way. With his games, his mood changes, his bunch of cuts-outs from his comic books. With that power to transform a nightmare into a dream. I don't want to be told anymore about the blush of innocence and of the whispering fears, as the only burden from that time. I don't want to have my hair stroked. The impiety of my wrinkles is enough to know what I never was. I want a child to tell me if I had that power. Peering into his eyes I want to be a child capable of telling tales.'*<sup>17</sup>

In itself a rotund anti-war manifesto, the poem denounces the fragility of any social world, expressing the lost dreams and opportunities suffered by the children during the Spanish Civil War. Ananda Dansa's *Crónica Civil V-36/39* is a jarring and powerful dance-theatre statement commanding the 'emphatic

---

<sup>16</sup> 'Requests'.

<sup>17</sup> 'Quiero un niño que me cuente que fui un niño. A su manera. Con sus juegos, sus saltos de humor, su pandilla de recortables de Tebeo. Con ese poder de transformar la pesadilla en sueño. Que no me hablen más del rubor de la inocencia y los miedos en voz baja, como único bagaje de aquel tiempo. Que no me pases más las manos por el pelo. La impiedad de mis arrugas basta para saber lo que no fui. Quiero un niño que me cuente si tuvo aquel poder. Asomado a sus ojos quiero ser un niño capaz de contra cuentos.'

BALLESTER, José: *Requerimientos* (1947).

parallelism'<sup>18</sup> of a discerning audience; as the offering of a 'mediating memory'<sup>19</sup> by its dramaturgy conveyed the universal sense of loss experienced by any child in times of war and paid homage to the strength of the lost Republican dream in equal terms. The score of this dance-theatre work –written by Pep Llopis and Vicent Alonso – enabled the audience to identify music as a language of identity pertinent to a definitive social group, as its performing introduced the bodies of the dancers as corporeal instruments capable of revitalizing ancient elements of folklore and secular dance related and belonging to Valencian culture. The decoding of the non-verbal signs populating the stage as carriers of information enabled the audience to recognize and establish the core of the production as social.



*Crónica Civil V-36/39* (Photo: José Alberto Fuentes)

Ananda Dansa's depiction of a particular social group functioning in an independent cultural field wherein identity was recognized as belonging to a particular area of Spain was per se a political stance, as one of the main stringent rules during the years of the dictatorship was the erasing or control of suspicious cultural and social demonstrations of identity – per se inherent to the different geographical areas of the Peninsula-, as their potential capacity to convey autonomous feelings of national identity was a major dissident issue to the totalitarian State and rejected as of peripheral value in the cultural field. Hitherto, one of the fundamental errors found in Franco's Regime once the

<sup>18</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London, 2006, p.8.

<sup>19</sup> MIRALLES, Remei and SIRERA, Josep Lluís, ed.: «La Trayectoria: Crear desde Valencia», *Ananda Dansa del baile a la palabra veinticinco años en escena*, PUV University of Valencia, Valencia, 2007, p.34.

Spanish Civil War was over, was to adjudicate arbitrarily the homogeneous *nacionalcatolicismo*<sup>20</sup> values as essential component of Spanish identity at large; without realising a simple fact: within the delimited territory encircled by frontiers locating a country on a map, any specific sociocultural phenomena (theatre, dance, poetry, novel, art) emerging from the defined social groups and groupings forming the mosaic of zigzagging social life, 'cannot be confused with the culture of a whole nation as such'<sup>21</sup>; as even in the extreme cases of political repression, imposed homogeneity, and ideological sanitation of human agency, such a delusory attempt made by force encourages, reinforces, and legitimates dissident positions and dispositions.



*Crónica Civil V-36/39* (Photo: Ananda Dansa)

Ananda Dansa played the performativity of a bare stage as the perfect space to enact social interaction and bestowed on the body of the dancers shamanistic values as they became interpreters of ritual practices by means of re-interpreting perceptions of Valencian dance and music. In *Crónica Civil V-36/39*, the physical interaction among the dancers employing direct or spatial body contact – kisses, caresses, grabbing of others' bodies, falling on the floor, carrying buckets, passing objects to one another – presupposed a non-static nature of society and offered instead a spectrum of meaning found at the core of

<sup>20</sup> 'National- Catholic'. A combination of the political regulations (National) and religious rules (Catholic) imposed by Franco's Regime which functioned across all fields and were imposed and controlled by censorship and the military. The tag defined the Regime's political core.

<sup>21</sup> SHEVTSOVA, Maria: «Cultural Values and the Purposes of the Theatre», *Theatre and Cultural Interaction*. University of Sydney, Sydney Studies, Sydney, 1993, p, 139.

human contact, something the *nacionalcatolicismo* tried to control and repress across all fields. Moreover, the sensitive combination of music and movement allowed the audience to understand the cultural tropes as part of a symbolic world, fostering identification with the social group depicted on stage. Hence, the universality found in this dance-theatre work's study on war and innocence has the same meaning and significant impact in any spatial/real time and global space, as the reaction it incites in discerning audiences makes the spectators to recognise social phenomena as a product of social context and a given culture.

The critical and public success of this production established the group firmly in the cultural field as its social constructionist approach to our conception of the body proposed the characters on stage as 'enmeshed with social forces and social relationships'<sup>22</sup>. The production became part of what Ananda Dansa codified in later years as 'The Trilogy of Violence'<sup>23</sup>, a progressive choreographed exploration on the devastating consequences of violence in a social world. Up to the end of the twentieth century, Ananda Dansa achieved an increasing global success with a string of explorative and uncompromised dance-theatre productions which delivered an array of ever crescent sophisticated *mise-en scène* proposals, while continued to contest audience's perception of established modern dance canons with *Basta de Danza* (1990), *Borgia Imperante* (1992), *Polo de hielo* (1993), *Nointendo* (1995), *Frankenstein* (1997), *Vivo en tiempos sombríos* (1998) and *El mago de Oz* (1999)<sup>24</sup>.



*Toda una Vida* (Photo: Jordi Pla)

<sup>22</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London, 2006, p.82.

<sup>23</sup> La Triología de la Violencia is made by three works: *Destiada* (1983), *Crónica Civil V-36/39* (1986) and *Homenaje a K* (1988).

<sup>24</sup> 'Enough of Dance' (1990), 'Prevailing Borgia' (1992), 'Ice Lolly' (1993), 'Nointendo' (1995), 'Frankenstein' (1997), 'Living in Somber Times' (1998) and 'The Wizard of Oz' (1999).

*Toda una Vida* (2000) is a powerful and uncomfortable tale of post- Spanish Civil War consequences, and points an accusatory finger to the damaging role played by the imposition of the *nacionalcatolicismo* rules on the making of identity and self during the dictatorship. This piece of dance-theatre combines the political with the poetic and it is a rotund corporeal manifesto by director Rosáγγελes Valls on the constrictions experimented by female identities functioning in definitive time (dictatorship) and social space (home life). Indeed, the choreographer herself said the production was ‘a spectacle I owned to my mother, my grandmother, my aunt. Now that this was not the moment to be against them, I could look at that age, at that education, that way of living life with love, and they didn’t deserve these memories to be lost’<sup>25</sup>. This statement outlined her disposition to offer a corporeal manifesto on social identity and reality which would not require ‘additional verification over and beyond its simple presence’, as the meaning of the choreography would be ‘simple there’<sup>26</sup>.



*Toda una Vida* (Photo: Jordi Pla)

---

<sup>25</sup> ‘Es un espectáculo que debía a mi madre, mi abuela y mi tía. Ahora que ya no era el momento de estar contra ellas, podía mirar esa época, esa educación, esa manera de vivir la vida con amor, y merecían que la memoria no se perdiera’.

MIRALLES, Remei and SIRERA, Josep Lluís, Ed.: «La Trayectoria: Crear desde Valencia», *Ananda Dansa del baile a la palabra veinticinco años en escena*, PUV University of Valencia, Valencia, 2007, p.61.

<sup>26</sup> BERGER, Peter and LUCKMAN, Thomas Ed.: *The social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin Press, London, 1996, p.37.

In this mesmerising piece of dance-theatre we encounter the children last seen in *Crónica Civil V-36/39* whose childhood was marred by the Spanish Civil War and who are now adults inhabiting the dystopian society created by Franco's Regime. *Toda una Vida* tells the story of a young couple and their personal journey in time as their relationship slowly sinks into unstoppable indifference, submission, broken hopes and, finally, violence. The corporeal manifesto on social identity transmitted by this powerful production on gender differential and women rights is a devastating vision on the fragility of women functioning in a definitive social world, and it is rooted in the flawed emotional education imposed by the Regime during the dictatorship. Indeed, it was in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War when the State embarked on the systematic delineation of precise bodies (demarcated by decorum and social rules) and restricted identity (accepted by the Regime and the Catholic Church) via the implementation of gender differential based on simple biological polarity; while purposely ignoring the role played by the unique element of self in the composite of identity and corporeality. In this context, in which ideology and religious belief delineated the differences between purity and taboo, the scrutiny placed on the body by the *nacionalcatolicismo* was based on an abstract conception of corporeality which configured the margins (natural and social) of a stratifying pyramid constructed by means of a disomorphic evaluation. This sexual pyramid, man on top and woman forming the base – woman almost exclusively identified as mother, sister, wife –, was shaped by the irrefutable sexual morality preached by Catholic dogma and by Franco himself, which in turn provided human agency with essential factors to construct meaning in bodies determined by external social classifications. This oppressive environment provided the social background of the choreography as the social male body of the dancer was in himself an embodiment of male power, representative of the secular and relentless process of domination and submission performed with varying degrees of violence and repression on female identities for nearly forty years of dictatorship. In this context, the Church provided the Regime with a recognizable discipline (Catholic rules) to restrict, control, justify, and ultimately delineate the corporeality of the human body (and by extension the self and its body vocabulary) through a process of atonement, penance, and punishment; which in turn fostered a virtual world-view constituted by fictitious notions of reality and social order. This dubious educational process is at the core of the plot in this choreography, wherein female identity is allocated a social role as wife which demonises any peripheral activity or thought the character might harbour as secondary to her role as homemaker. Therefore, the physical descent of both characters into domestic hell is representative of the silenced female identity bearing the stigma of violence; making the audience to question the social space the characters inhabit and the structures of dominant male power wherein they function.



*Toda una Vida* (Photo: Jordi Pla)

*Toda una Vida* portrays the slow fragmentation experimented by a couple in the social space of their own home. The meticulous and poetic score created by Pep Llopis was structured as a combination of evocative music, *boleros*, and by using original scripts from the popular radio programme *Dña. Elena Francis*<sup>27</sup> which allowed the audience to locate the couple in precise time. Llopis played the performativity of the score as music is per se a carrier of meaning in the semiotic field. The musical landscape encircled the journey of the two social identities on stage functioning in a social space; the space itself a symbolic and delicate proposal devised by Edison Valls. He covered the back of the stage with an unfinished floral tapestry which slowly was being completed and taking shape as the plot unfolded, employing also minimal furniture to create a precise and identifiable social space for the couple. As the two characters' relationship deteriorated, the more clearly the audience could see the tapestry taking shape; both stories – the couple and the tapestry-, developing their own narrative in unstoppable opposite directions, functioning on the symbolic field as

---

<sup>27</sup> The *Consultoria sentimental de Dña. Elena Francis* was broadcasted at national level from 1947 to 1984, the date at which continuous low ratings contributed to the cancellation of the programme. Elena Francis was a fictitious character -written by a journalist- specialised in women's affairs. The programme offered all type of counsel on family problems, beauty advice and cookery suggestions in its daily slot of 30 minutes.



representative of the construction of social imaginary and of the devastating realistic destruction of it. The choreography of *Toda una Vida* was an ensemble product created by Rosángeles Valls and by the dancers playing the two characters in the production, Susana Rodrigo and Toni Aparisi. The enthralling movement - encoded in definitive use of symbolic gesture - had reminiscences of Pina Bausch's *Cafe Müller* and *Kontakthof* as all of them are productions operating within the spectrum of *tanztheater* due to their experimental exploration of body movement and social interaction functioning in eurhythmic harmony.

In *Toda una Vida*, dance as interdisciplinary art form supersedes its own limits, as its ideological perspective goes beyond any poststructuralist discourse we could fabricate on the gender issues surrounding the making of female identity in Spanish society at large. Fundamentally, it questions those assigned qualities of submission which permitted acts of careless punishment to be inflicted by male hegemonic forces upon female identities on the basis of derived criteria which still remains unbroken in a modern society. Indeed, this uncomfortable and uncompromised work of dance-theatre rests on its uneasy parallelism with present-day daily life in Spain, wherein domestic violence still is inflicted on female identities in their own homes and in society at large. Therefore, the basic motive behind this production's discourse rejects any possible idealization to justify the social world it depicts; as the negligence encompassed in the dynamics of signification embodied in the relationship of the characters does not accept any excuse as valid to justify for the brutality unfolding in front of our eyes. It is a denouncement of a form of disciplinary male body controlled by a panoptic political structure which promoted the reproduction of docile bodies and identities by means of cropping any questioning related to the development of self. Again, the warning against reproduction is at the core of the group's stance. Like for Bourdieu, Ananda Dansa is conscious of the role played by the body seen as bearer of symbolic value, hence placing the characters as reproducing social practices and social structures enmeshed in symbolic violence. The dramaturgical model develops as a story of love: falling in love, being in love and falling out of love. Yet, it is the obliterating effect of the consequences of unrequited love what makes it so devastating: the journey experienced by the female character from object of male gaze to subject of violence.

*Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida* are dance-theatre cultural products wherein the construct of social definitive worlds in time and space is at the core of their social action and interaction with the audience. Yet, the cross-disciplinarity delineating the corporeality of these two cultural products is interwoven in the highly sophisticated dramaturgy employed by the group to develop plot and structure in the choreographies. The two works are highly dramaturgical pieces, wherein non-literary text circulates freely between the dancers and the spectators on a symbolic field and which in the elaboration of a language of identity is based on the continuous exploration of dance as movement of the human body in social context.



*Toda una Vida* (Photo: Jordi Pla)

The dramaturgical blueprint in both productions is constituted by spatial-temporal parameters (the Spanish Civil War/ the early years of the dictatorship) as well by the symbolic space whereon action takes place (an abstract playing space/ inside a home). In both choreographies, the setting is enmeshed in symbolic value as it precedes the action and integrates the characters into it. Yet, Ananda Dansa's intelligent proposal on identity and body presents the former as a 'key element of subjective reality'; as subjective reality - made of a diversity of types of memory: historical and communicative- 'stands in a dialectic relationship with society'<sup>28</sup>, thus suggesting to the spectators the possibility of change still found among the debris formed by the residual fragments of insufficient emotional education left by the legacy of the dictatorship. Both productions' political stance acknowledged our perception of identity in contemporary Spain is crafted by historical processes occurring in time and space; thus, although the evolution of our formative context has certainly moved away from the boundaries of the *nacionalcatolicismo*, human agency still is saturated by the production of meaning found in our dialectic

---

<sup>28</sup> BERGER, Peter and LUCKMAN, Thomas Ed.: *The social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin Press, London, 1996, p.19.

interpretation of (historical) signifiers and signifieds, and it is dependent on our cultural, political, religious and social DNA. Yet, despite the accumulation of capital across borders, the conflict between past and future still is our present. The questioning of the past in Spain is a highly emotional subject, enmeshed in the building of human agency and interwoven in the making of self. Indeed, the consequences of the dictatorship are still visible in the social legacy left by the *nacionalcatolicismo* and its revision is a constant subject of controversy.

*Crónica Civil V-36/39* and *Toda una Vida* re-created a part of Spain's past still very much alive in every single field of Spanish society, and their uncompromised message stand the passing of time as they voiced the 'eternal questions of our souls', their significance 'still undiminished, unbowed, (their) absolute claims unredeemed'<sup>29</sup> in the social landscape of the new Spain. Ananda Dansa's two seminal pieces on Spanish past moved beyond the sphere of the purely aesthetic criticism of poignant issues onto the more complex universe of the ethics, delivering along the process two choreographed social manifestos in precise time and space.

---

<sup>29</sup> BOCH, Ernest: *The Spirit of Utopia*, Translated by Anthony A. Nassar, Stamford University Press, California, 2000, p.2.