

Interview

Alejandro Jodorowsky: “I Disappear”

Ana E. Iribas

Alejandro Jodorowsky (Iquique, Chile, 1929), is not easily pigeon-holed. He started off in puppet theatre, went on doing mime, stage acting and directing. In Paris, he founded the Panic Theater movement with Topor and Arrabal. He took on film direction, in the underground cult movies *Fando and Lis* (1967), *The Mole* (1970), *The Sacred Mountain* (1974), *Santa Sangre* (1984), and the less renowned *Tusk* (1980) and *The Rainbow Thief* (1990). He also projected a screen adaptation of Frank Herbert’s novel, *Dune*. Jodorowsky is a writer of comic scripts (the best known is *The Incal*, illustrated by Moebius), poetry, and novels like *Donde mejor canta un pájaro* (*Where a Bird Sings Best*) (1994), *El niño del jueves negro* (*The Black Thursday Child*) (1999), or *La danza de la realidad* (*The Dance of Reality*) (2001). Following a major life crisis, he decided to direct his work towards healing. The fruit of this new orientation are his therapeutic techniques, *tarology* (a Tarot reading, guided by symbolism and mythology, for the insight into the consultant’s psychological and vital problems), *psychogenealogy* (the study of the effect of ancestors and family members on the individual’s life scripts), *psychomagic* (an intuitive therapy in which, after diagnosing the problem causing the consultant’s symptoms, Jodorowsky prescribes a psychomagic act that unites poetry, symbol and myth), and *psychoshamanism* (a shamanistic ritualization, in which the consultant is symbolically “operated” and liberated of his problems). His latest essays, which condense the core ideas of his therapeutic work, are *Psicomagia* (*Psychomagic*) (2004) and *La vía del Tarot* (*The Way of the Tarot*) (2004). He lives in Paris.

Although Alejandro Jodorowsky wasn’t in the best shape at the moment, he generously granted a brief interview. Buried in a leather armchair, he answered in a low voice, the gaze fixed on the table.

Ana Iribas – Alejandro, you seem unwell, how are you?

Alejandro Jodorowsky – I am.

A.I. – Would you rather not give the interview?

A.J. – ... Come the fuck on!

A.I. – OK... Could you describe your attitude in life as an artist?

A.J. – I don't have a label, I don't proceed in life as an artist, I'm in life as a human being. This is, I don't have an artist's attitude. To say "artist" to someone is to label him. I'm not an artist, or a sportsman, or a politician, or a mystic, I'm nothing. I'm a human being. That's the answer.

A.I. – Alright. So, when you're helping people, when you are performing psychomagic, when you are doing tarology, how are you, where are you?

A.J. – I simply am not, there is the other. I disappear.

A.I. – When you don't act, or when not-you acts, do you feel in a different state of consciousness, in which you enter with the consultant?

A.J. – I don't have more faces, I am the same at any moment. Even when I go to the bathroom and relieve myself, I'm the same.

A.I. – A very good answer... How do you let the other flow through you, or how do you let this process happen?

A.J. – Saying "let" is taking power. I don't let anything, I don't do anything. In other words, I put myself in a listening attitude, and I listen. And the other is what he is, or what he is being, without my intervention.

A.I. – And what is it that operates through you when you're not there?

A.J. – Look, if I could define what operates through me, I'd be Saint John of the Cross, or Ramakrishna, or... Buddha. I don't have the slightest idea of what it is that operates through me, because it's something unthinkable.

A.I. – When you are in a trance state —to name it somehow—, how is that state? How is that not-being-within-yourself?

A.J. – That which you call trance is a state of attention to what is important, leaving aside the superfluous. That's all: a state of extreme attention.

A.I. – How can you be sure that you're not projecting or inventing when you work with the other?

A.J. – Well, that's what's called certainty. If you don't have certainty, you don't do anything. That sort of question never crosses my mind. I have absolute certainty that what I'm doing is right. Otherwise, I wouldn't do it.

A.I. – Can you do without helping people?

A.J. – ... How can a fish do without swimming?

A.I. – When people see you as a guru, how do you manage to deviate all that projection?

A.J. – I do absolutely nothing. I choose my company, that's all.

A.I. – But when masses gather around you, what do you do to deviate that?

A.J. – I do what I can to be charming.

A.I. – Tell me about the power of the “as if”: the invocatory power of acting as if one were a saint in ordinary life, the curative power of acting as if one were a person without problems, etc.

A.J. – I speak of the sense of imitation. But not in the sense of aping. A monkey or a parrot imitate forms. The imitation of contents is very different, right? Then, it's about imitating contents. When you imitate contents, you feel them; you feel; imitating is feeling. Then the human body feels, but you can direct these sensations. It's about having the feeling of being a saint, not about imitating like a monkey.

A.I. – What is madness?

A.J. – A madman is a sane man who doesn't produce work.

A.I. – And what is a sick person?

A.J. – A sick person is someone for whom certain things he wanted have been prohibited, and who has been forced to do other things he didn't want to do.

A.I. – How can art help us to liberate ourselves from madness and illness?

A.J. – Art is like an exhaust pipe, the exhaust pipe in the cars... Therefore, art helps to discharge energies. Now, there are some who put filters in the exhaust pipe and some who don't. Those who don't put filters, discharge the energy in a negative way. Those who put filters, transform that energy and discharge it in a positive way, creating an art for healing.

A.I. – So then, does beauty heal? How is beauty?

A.J. – Oh!... Beauty isn't a medicine, it's an end. In other words, illness is the lack of beauty. Leaving illness aside is, then, reaching beauty. But how can beauty be curative if you don't have it? To heal means to obtain it. Therefore, it can't be said that beauty is healing. Beauty is health. One has to search for a different medicine than beauty.

A.I. – How can art help us raise our level of consciousness?

A.J. – ... Look... To answer that, I wrote a whole book called *Psicomagia* (*Psychomagic*) and another whole book called *La danza de la realidad* (*The Dance of Reality*). So, well, I can't explain that because it's a whole technique... It's hard for me to answer that. One has to read those two books.

A.I. – Yes, I have, that's why I asked. Well, alright... What's the miracle in life?

A.J. – It's to learn to see reality as it is.

A.I. – What can you say about reality and thought? How are they linked?

A.J. – Well... Establishing a duality between reality and thought is separating things that are united, because how can you separate reality from thought,

thought from reality? Reality, in the moment I grasp it, is thought, essentially. Reality is what I think reality is. And that's for everyone. So for me there is no difference between thought and reality.

A.I. – And how can our insight affect our reality?

A.J. – Actually, we're not what we are, but rather what the others want, in the beginning. Gaining insight is simply becoming what one is. The only happiness consists in being what one is. There is no other happiness. The greatest punishment is not living in the present. Then, when one arrives to a perfect insight, one is happy, finally.

A.I. – Do you consider yourself happy?

A.J. – I don't consider myself, I told you before, I'm not seeing myself, I don't have duality in my mind. I can't speak about myself, because if I did, I'd be two: the one that's happy and the one that sees himself being happy, and that doesn't exist in me.

A.I. – So you've overcome, so as to say, a dualistic vision...

A.J. – Well, if I said overcome, I'd be arrogant. Therefore, I can't accept the concept of overcoming, but, as far as possible, I've finished with inner dialogue. As far as possible.

A.I. – How are you now?

A.J. – In a bad mood.

A.I. – We can end it here, if you like, and you're free.

A.J. – Thank you.

A.I. – Many thanks to you.

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