

Meditations On by ISPA
Diana Gutierrez & Juan Medina Episode Transcription

Ilter Ibrahimof

You're listening to Meditations On, brought to you by ISPA.

I'm your host Ilter Ibrahimoff.

Diana Gutierrez

If we connect with our vulnerability I think we are also capable to be more empathic with other human beings.

Juan Medina

I think that the kind of work of dance worships of joining and of experiencing ourselves in in all of our materiality right? From touch kinesthetics, the smell, the co-presence. The body is important and it allows us to do this discoveries and interactions.

Ilter Ibrahimof

That was Diana Teresa Gutierrez, CEO of Embodying Reconciliation based in Colombia, and Juan Philippe Miranda Medina, a lecturer in Peru, at the Universidad Cattolica San Pablo. Their collective work promotes empathy towards meaningful reconciliation, as well as individual and collective well being.

Using the human body as the primary tool, their tailored workshops and dialogues for marginalized communities foster mutual discovery, respect and increased acceptance of others. Their work aims to affect social emotional development through programs that are designed to help communities from different social backgrounds and ethnicities expand their capacity for empathy, manage stress, and express emotions in a common space.

We spoke virtually in November of 2021 to discuss how arts leaders need to first understand ourselves better in order to begin building sustainable relationships and mutual respect for one another.

Diana Gutierrez

El cuerpo no miente. Y en este devenir que es la vida donde lo único cierto es la incertidumbre misma, Cuerpos para la Reconciliación es un proyecto en movimiento, una búsqueda constante que explora herramientas corporales y utiliza el patrimonio cultural inmaterial para fomentar pequeñas acciones de paz.

In embody reconciliation, we are fostering empathy through the body. And we have three tools in order to do so. So we have empathy activities, through movement,. What we do in these activities is that we observe others movements, to try to express feelings, thoughts, and gestures of how other bodies move. The other pathway is through cartographies. So we do lots of body maps, and collective maps in order to create external representations of our own bodies

of our own cultural practices through movement through sounds, through video through performance. And these representations allows us our participants also to recognize ourselves and the others , no? In this representation. And the other pathway to foster empathy through dance and movement is using local practices, but local practices that are embodied, no ? Corporal local practices in order to understand what are like the core practices that communities or groups share. What our movements, gestures, postures that identifies ourselves, in our dances in our movements, but also in our daily practices in order to recognize what makes us unique, and also to dialogue with the difference. In order to develop these, say these value these human ability that allow us to connect with others experience. It's important to have four premises so the first one is a sense of self. To understand the other one it's important to start with ourselves to know to understand our own inner states, our own emotions, because we are not in contact with what happens inside. it's very difficult to understand what happens outside. No? So that's the first thing. The second one is a sense of the other one, a sense of what makes us different. No? This is extremely important because it connects us with the distress or needs of others, no? Which is nowadays very difficult because we are in our heads in our own bodies in our own needs in our own computer. And it's very difficult to actually try to connect with other ones needs and distress and difficulties and values or views of life, no? A third premise is a nonverbal, expressive skills. And that's why our work focuses so much in the body in this rhythmic interactive process of mutual imitation of how we read each other's nonverbal communication or nonverbal gestures, even if we are right now communicating in the screens we can see our faces, we can see our postures, we can see our hands we can see how we are communicating, no? And this is extremely important, no? To be aware of these skills. Another requisite for empathy is to start developing an optimal bodily dimension of how we use our body in different dynamics, no? Since we are kids we're imitating what our adults does what our mom does what our peers does in a conscious or unconscious way. And this is something that it's very present through all our life. We connect with other human beings in complementary ways. But also in contrasting ways. These bodily dimension of social interactions of understanding the other one is extremely powerful. If we are able to work in a sense of ourselves in a sense of the other, and what makes us different in our non verbal skills, and how our bodily dimension enables social interactions, it will bring us closer to a wider concept of empathy.

Juan Medina

In my case I've been working with Afro-Peruvians. So I started like doing fieldwork. Then I acquired more formal training with this common master program that both Diana and me took, Corremundos. I wrote a dissertation about Afro Peruvian Zapateo, which is this kind of battle, it's a cool battle. But you don't use fancy movements, like in breakdancing, but you use rhythm. So you have to do rhythm with your body with your hands with your feet, especially right. So it has been a process. For example, a very nice experience that I had in 2020 was gathering seven of the most representative dancers and and writing together with them a monograph that was 99 pages long. And they were saying it's the first time that we sit down and we actually discuss our practice and exchange impressions and contrast our styles. It was a very important first step, I think. And I think that we should think about rhythm as a game, when we say let's clap all together, we're playing this game, where the rule is that, you know, you have to hear the other and we have to be together, we have to be doing the same thing. So already there, you're

creating a common space. And this creation of common spaces where we can feel Yeah, we are, in fact, human beings, and we can do similar things. I think that is a great way to create to foster empathy. So I think in that sense that maybe a concept that we overlook, sometimes is the concept of game. It encompasses almost everything that we do. Even an orchestra playing a serious opera by Wagner is in a sense, playing a game, right, where they have this guy called a director, and they have to follow him and they have rules for what they can or cannot do. But in the sense they're trying to achieve something together. So I think that's a little bit more abstract sense of game that can help us understand how empathy can be fostered. So how can we exert transformation? And maybe that's another point in common that Diana and me have that we are very transformation oriented, right? I mean, there's there's stuff that needs to be done. And And art is a way in the sense that art is a game, it can teach us it can teach us It provides life like a simulation platform for us to experience different ways of difference and how to relate to this. So I think that there is also a value In providing a theoretical framework about decolonization, which is what Diana and me have done. So right now, it's the fact that we have to acknowledge that we have old being affected by these violent processes that we continue to exert and to experience violence. So then we need to do something about this. In my case, I started more from a research oriented line. And in that sense, well, one component has been teaching dance and including this reflexive awareness of the value of the practice of something that teaches you about life, right? Not that not it's not just about moving, but it's telling you something about life and about how to live and how to relate better to others. So I trust that has an impact on the participants and in in the dance worships that I hold, I think that's the kind of work of dance worships may be of joining and of experiencing ourselves in, in all of our materiality, right, from touch. kinesthetics, the smell that the co-presence the body is important, and it allows us to do these discoveries and interactions.

Diana Gutierrez

In our work, we are working in emergency contexts, no? We're working with participants that are immersed in wars, in violent armed conflict, gender, domestic violence, gender violence, all sorts of very, very complex situations. The territory, the social dynamics are so uncertain. The body really covers a special importance because it speaks to us about the state of mind of the person, the state of our emotional body of our personal stories, but also our social dynamics. And when we work with different groups, like peasants, and armed conflict and guerrilla our task is not to make them think the same way. Peace is not about a goal or or being in an absolutely consent, which is something that it's really misunderstood. Peace is when we are all happy, we'll all agree about something. And of course, in real life, this is not what happens, no? Life is much more complex. But what we feel it's really important is to be able to respect the difference No? And through the body through some of these activities that really put the local practices on the table, we are fostering their respect for local practices.

El cuerpo como un archivo de memorias y vínculos transcurridas, el cuerpo que respira, que late, que puede percibir al otro más allá del lenguaje hablado. La empatía en movimiento nos ayuda a movilizar nuestras heridas y a encontrarnos en las diferencias y semejanzas con otros cuerpos. Cuerpos fragmentados que hablan de heridas, vínculos y memorias. Cuerpos fragmentados que se encuentran para crear nuevos caminos y posibilidades.

It's easier to start with what makes us happy, what connects us what is what We resonate what our core values as our communities? When we just give a space to talk about what makes people happy. What makes them proud. We are all very proud, no? So we are very, I found it very easy to start. Okay, let's share about let's talk about our dances, our music, our gastronomy. And from from these identity, cultural codes, common ground, it's very useful to start asking deeper questions, no? About how we embodied this practice, about how different situations maybe changed them. What I'm trying to say is that it's always very important to give meaning to what people do to what people know, to what people are proud of. And from that, you connect better, no? We are always happy to show the face that make us proud. And from that, I think it's easier to slowly step by step, talk about our differences.

Juan Medina

I think that it helps to experience radical difference and to accept that empathy can go through a transformation, right, and saying, I don't like you at first, and then like the kind of dynamics that Diana promotes and I try to promote myself leads us to say, maybe maybe she's okay. Maybe he's okay. You know, okay, maybe we have some things in common. So I also think that there is a process of discovery there. So empathy is not not something that necessarily you feel and stays there but something that can change and then okay, how can you know that you're doing something good? And then Diana says well, you see that the participants they get more engaged. And you see that they I will say they smile more, right? They they feel more comfortable with their bodies. The fact that we're capable of agreeing, let's play this game now where we move at the same rhythm, the fact that you immediately experienced that we human beings are capable of agreeing on things and doing things together. I think that's a powerful way of just gathering hope on a very immediate basis. And it's a hope that allows you to carry on your work as hard as you can with the greatest push that you can.

Ilter Ibrahimof

Meditations On is presented by ISPA.

This episode was produced by Kristine White and Ilter Ibrahimoff.

Editorial assistance, mixing, and original music and sound design by Johnny Spence.

Our executive producer is David Baile, Chief Executive Officer of ISPA.

Special thanks to Diana Gutierrez and Juan Miranda