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Beauty and Gore: Unsettling Audiences in the 2018 Production of *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*

An Interview with Theatre Director Christian Vallez (a. k. a. Juan X)

Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio (1968) by Paul Dumol is a gem of Philippine theatre. Being one of the first post-modern plays written in Filipino, it has gained popularity with the Filipino audiences. Framed as a trial of beggars, this play opens the wounds of contemporary society and poses existential questions to the spectator. Already forming part of a trial, the audience could not but judge the sins of human cruelty, injustice, and social inequality. Although there have been innumerable productions, both professional and amateur, the 2018 production stands out among them. Even the playwright, Paul Dumol, declared it his favorite. The 2018 fiftieth-anniversary production of *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*, was a collaboration between Theatre Titas and Duende Theatre and performed in Poblacion, Makati City, in Novembre, 2018. It was staged by an acclaimed theatre director and Dumol's disciple, Christian Vallez, also known as Juan Ekis. The play received notable recognition at the Broadway World Philippines Awards, where it earned a total of nine nominations and ultimately won two awards: Best

Director, awarded to Juan Ekis, and Best Featured Actress (Andrea Fe Padilla, as Interrogator 2).

Vallez is a writer and playwright himself who has won Palanca Awards for his plays: *Twenty Questions* (2003), *Kapeng Barako Club: Samahan ng Mga Bitter* (2010), and *Pingkian* (2024), which he put onstage. His latest play *L.E.G.I.O.N* (2024), a university-based comedy, was highly influenced by staging of *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio* in its atmosphere, design, and interaction with the audience. Vallez also worked with National Artist for Film Marilou Diaz-Abaya and taught screenwriting and film production at her institute. This interview, which took place on June 6, 2025, is the conversation with Vallez about the 2018 production of *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*.

Sophia Marco and Svetlana Antropova: Why did you decide to stage Paul Dumol's *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*, written in 1968? What was your motivation as a theatre director?

Juan X: I directed two productions of *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*: the 2010 university production for a student theater organization of University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) and the 2018 one to commemorate the play's fiftieth anniversary. Both share the same concept, albeit the second one was financed.

So why did I choose to stage this play? The answer is simple; it is *the play* that made me choose theater. When I was a freshman in high school, my dream was to be like the Steve Jobs or the Bill Gates of the Philippines. Thus, I chose programming. At that time, I was not interested in theatre at all. The first real production I watched was *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio* (in Southridge, Alabang), which was directed by a professional stage director from UP (University of the Philippines), Abdel Langit. This production left a lasting impression on me; I was profoundly struck by its compelling blend of beauty and horror. All

the actors were not beggars but animals (dogs, goats, etc.) except for Serapio, who was the only human being. Sol, the doll, in turn, when taken out of the chest was a dead chicken. It was so visceral and so terrifying for me as a freshman, albeit beautiful. And that was the first time I fell in love with theater. However, it took me time to start theatre professionally. I debuted as a stage director in a theatre competition at high school, but this was amateur. At that time, I was directing choral interpretations of poetry *(sabayang pag-bigkas)*. These choral recitations of poetry are like theatre, and their staging was greatly influenced by the viscerality that I saw in Langit's production.

When I got into UA&P, I chose to take up Information and Technology, but we were required to join one arts organization and one sports organization. I originally joined the school paper, but it shut down. I saw the presentation of the Filipino theater org, and I thought it was fun, so I auditioned, but I told them, "I don't act, I don't direct, I write." I did not tell them that I wrote poetry, not plays. Fortunately, they accepted me, and that was where I learned how to write plays. The first play I wrote for my first entry to the Playfest was a sequel of *Serapio*, which was a comedy. As Paul Dumol was a Professor at UA&P, I asked for his feedback, and that is when my relationship with Paul started. Now, fast forward to 2018 when I did this version of *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*, I found out that the play was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, and as we started our own small independent theater group, it was an excuse for us to mount that play. But even before the 2010 production, I wanted to have my own version, because that play really made me go into theater.

Marco and Antropova: Was Paul Dumol involved in this production?

X: I guess only so far as he is my mentor; he was not really involved. He gave me total freedom in staging *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*.

However, we had a lot of conversations discussing what his intentions behind the play were. His answers were normally rather cryptic as Paul wanted me to discover more things about the play on my own based on the material—although the one thing he made clear to me that the thesis behind the play is God is love. That was what I worked on in my version of Serapio. And then after a lot of conversations and reflections, I realized that to show us that *God is love*, Paul created a theatrical world without God. Thus, if there is no God, there is no love, no justice, no compassion, and everything is perverted. Such a wonderful thesis and such a powerful thing, and you must dig to find it. I tried my best to bring it out with my staging.

Marco and Antropova: How did the collaborative process between Theatre Titas and Duende theatre shape this production's initial process through rehearsals to performance? What were your actors' experiences working with such psychologically demanding material?

X: Although we are two companies, in real life we are good friends. We have been mounting theatre productions since our college days. The only reason we had two separate production companies is that we wanted to do different things. However, both companies were willing to stage *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*, so we joined forces. Theatre Titas was strong at marketing, selling, and producing so they took care of marketing, posters, design, management. My group in turn took care of the performance and the design. Our collaboration in this production was a very pleasant experience, and I am eager to work with them again in the future.

As for the psychological training of the actors, I just told them to go out and watch beggars and then make notes. Afterwards, we shared thoughts and observations of their experiences in the beggars' world. It was not the internalising, my technique was to observe and then,

to physically simulate what they had seen. There is a profound connection between physical action and psychological perception. When the body undergoes certain experiences such as hunger, the soul begins to internalize a sense of deprivation. In this way, the feeling of poverty is initially induced through external, bodily conditions rather than internal reflection. Interestingly, the internalization of these experiences often emerged only after rehearsals, during our debriefing sessions. It was in these reflective moments that the actors began to process and articulate the emotional and psychological impact of embodying such conditions during intensive rehearsal runs.

Marco and Antropova: How many performances did you have? Did the audiences in different productions of the play reacted similarly to the play?

X: I am not too sure, but usually we have twelve shows. I think after the first twelve shows, we might have extended it to a second run, there were six or ten shows more. So that would be weekend shows, one show on a Friday night, two shows on Saturday and one on a Sunday afternoon.

As for the audience's reactions, one of the most powerful ones was that they did not clap at the end of the play. They were shocked and disturbed by the play. And we took that as a compliment, if the audience were clapping, they were not processing things. For most of the shows, I would have a debriefing session at the end of the play. After a few seconds of silence, I entered the stage and opened the floor for some discussion so that the audience can process their feelings about the play. And almost all the time the reactions were very positive. As a lot of my audience members belonged to the middle and upper class, they were shocked that these things were real, in a sense. Of course, a lot of things were exaggerated onstage, but this play is based on a

newspaper article that Paul read when he was young about a syndicate of beggars, which exists up to now. I had also invited my spiritual director, a priest, to attend the performance. Unbeknownst to me, he was in a period of mourning following the recent death of his mother. After the performance, he expressed that he was deeply disturbed and emotionally overwhelmed by its intensity, stating, "You should have warned me how heavy this would be." Despite the emotional weight, he appreciated the production and found it profoundly moving. His reaction highlighted the emotional depth of the piece, which others also described as heavy and eye-opening. Remarkably, some audience members even described the performance as "beautiful", a term not often associated with my previous works.

Nevertheless, we also had some negative reactions, which were very specific. As there was a very violent scene where the Interrogator crushed the eyeballs and splatted the blood on the audience, two spectators complained about their clothes, which were stained by the blood. We reassured them that the blood was washable. Therefore, in the succeeding shows we warned the audience about blood splatting and gave out plastic bags for protection.

Marco and Antropova: Did you have any difficulties in staging this play as a director?

X: The first challenge was to look for a place. In 2010, *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio* was performed at the university, which was rather rich. The performance space was huge: we converted the university hall into a squatter's area. With an arena at the center, we created a maze around it. Once in the maze, it felt like one was walking through the alleys of a slum area. There were clotheslines, a sari-sari store, there were beggars sleeping on the floor, and then you had to go around nine corners which represented the nine circles of hell, since my concept was a fusion of

Dante's *Inferno* and Dumol's *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio*. However, I could not do that in the 2018 production because the space was different. For the 2018 production I found a dilapidated house, an old house that got burned which they transformed it into an event space, a fancy art space. This is what I turned into the theater.

The second challenge was working with younger actors, minors, because I wanted to make sure that the kids have some training so they can understand what they were doing. It was like being a babysitter while directing. But in general, it was a gratifying experience.

Marco and Antropova: Once we started talking about the venue, which was the ruins of a dilapidated house in Poblacion, Makati City, we could not but notice that the space was rather small. It did not allow you to accommodate a large audience. Were there any reasons behind this choice?

X: I did have my reasons. Most of the plays I directed were chamber theater, the largest audience I had in a play would be 100–120 people. I do not usually mount big performances, and I felt *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio* needed to be intimate. So, when I found this house, I thought it was perfect because it created an atmosphere of intimacy. As we also had to make some money, we made sure that there were enough people to pay for the performance. So, there was comfortable seating for eighty spectators, which afterwards was pushed to one hundred since more people wanted to see it. We did not have enough seats, but some spectators were willing to stand, so we let them in. Thus, in most of the shows people were standing.

My other reason to make the stage small was for the audience to feel the actors. It was deliberate on our part, because as I mentioned before, the concept was a fusion of Dante's *Inferno* and *Serapio*. To reinforce the

idea that the place without God is hell, I told my production designer that I wanted the audience to feel suffocated by the space, I did not want them to feel comfortable. Therefore, there were no cushions on the chairs, and, underneath the seats, there were speakers that emitted the sounds of mosquitoes. Furthermore, to add to the atmosphere of general discomfort, the air conditioning was turned on making the air cold to fit the concept of Dante's *Inferno*. We also had cold blue lighting to add to the coldness of this theatrical space. During the first performance, we tried to smoke the place. But it was not well accepted because the spectators were coughing, so we took it out. To tell you the truth, the first night was a disaster! In the ensuing performances what we did was, before the audience entered, we had smoked the place a little bit, just so that when the spectators entered the theatre, they could see the ray of light from above. By the time they sat down, the smoke would have cleared.

Marco and Antropova: As far as we understood (after talking with one of the spectators), the performance itself had already started before one's entering the venue. What were your expectations for the spectators' reactions to handing out plastic bags by beggars in the street close to the venue?

X: On the one hand, that was for practical reasons: we wanted to make sure that there was an "usher" waiting line to get the tickets and to go in. On the other hand, that was part of the experience. I had always wanted to prime the audience for the performance. So, we had a pre-show. Sometimes one can encounter crazy people who are talking gibberish to themselves, I wrote a short monologue for one of the beggars in the street. The rest of the actors, beggars, acted like ushers, guiding the spectators to their seats. However, they were also playing their roles: while the people were coming in their cars, the actors begged them for money. Surprisingly, the spectators gave them money. In fact, one of my

actors earned two thousand pesos. So, all the actors looked so real: dirty and unkept. Before the play started, we wanted to prepare the audience by creating the milieu of the performance: utter poverty. What they did not know was that in the end it would be brought to another level, the poverty of the soul.

Marco and Antropova: As for the stage organization, we were rather bewildered to see that there were three major performing spots: in the center, at the back of the audience (the place where the judge sits), and on the staircase, not to mention that the actors were moving around the venue. Was it not an impediment for the spectators to follow the performance?

X: This is a very good question, and it was also a challenge for me as a director to design the space. From the very beginning I did not want to have just one acting space because I consider it visually boring. The first design principle behind the architecture of this theatrical space was as long as I can see the entire play, if I move my head within 180°, then I am fine. The second principle was as long as I could hear everything, even if I do not see, then I am good. I was perfectly aware that the audience was able to see the center but not all of them would see the Judge and the stairs, but it was not essential for me. What was important is that they could hear since sometimes what you cannot see terrifies you more, for example, the magic of the *Blair Witch Project* was terrifying because one could not see anything. Therefore, I am comfortable with certain elements remaining unseen by the audience. In fact, I had previously directed other plays employing similar techniques, which actively engaged the audience by encouraging them to use their imagination to fill in the gaps. For me it is the beauty of theater where you co-create a play with an audience giving them enough information so that they can connect the dots. That was challenging for me as a director but for the audience I did not receive any complaints.

Marco and Antropova: We think that this performance managed to erase the invisible line between the audience and the actors. Can you comment on some of the staging techniques you had had in mind before the premiere?

X: The script of the play itself gave us a lot of opportunities to blur these lines, because it was a trial, and in a trial, there will be people in the audience and there will be a jury or a judge. Although we do not have juries in the Philippines, we are raised in Hollywood, so we are familiar with that system. And somehow, because of the design of the seating arrangement, you will either feel you form part of the audience of the trial, or you are a member of the jury. I also asked my actors to break the fourth wall by always looking at the audience, and occasionally they would address the spectators sitting close to them. For example, when an actor agreed with Interrogator 1, they would address one of the spectators: "She's right, or he's right!"

And then, of course, at the climax, when they started tossing the doll around the performance space, albeit hesitant at first, the spectators also participated in this cruel act. And the longer they passed the doll around, the crueler they became. They started having fun and enjoying it, until someone from the audience stopped and gave the doll back to Serapio. And then I gave my actors the instruction, if it was taking too long, just grab the doll and get us back on track. I think there was only one show in which the doll was not passed around for too long: there was a spectator who burst into tears and returned it to Serapio.

On the other hand, there were shows when some of the spectators repeated the Interrogator's words "Blind him!" Most of the time the audience would agree, or they would be silent and just terrified to speak out. At the debriefing session they admitted that they were afraid

to speak out, and mostly because they were not sure whether they were allowed to speak out in a play.

Another device I used was the gore, I think, the fact that there was a possibility that "blood may be splashed on you" already invites interaction. I learned this from Hitchcock: "Terror comes from anticipation." While you are watching, it is not really the moment of the killing which terrifies you the most but the process of anticipation of evil to come. In the beginning, when we made that announcement that there would be "blood-splashing" and handed out plastic bags, it was also a powerful device to build up tension and maintain the audience alert and terrified throughout the performance. For example, some people in front were afraid and even wanted to change places to sit at the back. Paradoxically, the spectators were really waiting for this moment. But when it did happen, their faces bore the look of utter horror. Of course, we used special effects, but blood splashing was so physically close, that even though you knew it was fake, you could not but felt scared and intimidated.

Marco and Antropova: The blinding scene, when one of the interrogators squeezes Serapio's eyes, taken out of his sockets, onto the audience, was utterly cruel. Do you consider such a brutal and disgusting scene necessary?

X: I do not think it was necessary. You can tell the same story without showing it, but with the effect that I wanted to achieve, I felt it was necessary. I was talking about outrage. We are easily outraged by injustice, but I feel that the kind of outrage that we experience when we read of injustice or watch it on the news is not as moving as seeing the actual injustice. Like, for example, you become more outraged, it is a deeper kind of outrage when you see a CCTV footage of someone who is

at fault in a car crash, for example. But when you witness something in person, you experience it in a different mode, you experience stronger emotions. And I am hoping as an artist that these emotions are so strong that they will push you into action. That is my hope! You do not have to be transformed into a philanthropist upon witnessing injustice, but at least you start to see a beggar in a different light. There was someone who told me that after watching my play, he started giving alms to beggars, because he imagined their secret lives and now, he had a different appreciation of beggars. In my case, I am now more mindful of the beggars I give to. For example, if they are old people, automatically, I give them money. If they are kids, I do not, because I do not want to teach them the wrong values. They should go to school and study.

Marco and Antropova: Why did you use a child in the blinding scene?

X: I remember having a long discussion with my cast and crew about that scene, but its incorporation was deliberate. The child actor was our producer's son, Franco. I recognize that incorporating a child into a blinding scene may be perceived as controversial. However, my intention was to construct a paradox between innocence and guilt within the context of a trial in which the audience was fully aware of Serapio's innocence. The presence of a child, traditionally regarded as a universal symbol of innocence, complicates this dynamic. Although the child appears innocent, that innocence was compromised through instrumentalization within the violent spectacle. This contradiction served to deepen the thematic tension between perceived innocence and actual complicity. Furthermore, the child was the one who was carrying the glass jar filled with human eyes, so it was implicit that this was not the first trial. Countless beggars had already been blinded. In effect, other characters symbolically absolved themselves of responsibility by placing the eyes into the hands of the child, thereby reinforcing the

illusion that the trial was just and legitimate. From the perspective of the syndicate, the act signified that the proceedings were so morally sound that even an innocent child was deemed worthy of participating in it. Nevertheless, the audience was fully aware that the trial was fundamentally unjust, as were likely the countless others symbolized by the collection of eyes. This dissonance, between the claim of justice and the visual representation of innocence, provoked a sense of moral discomfort or even disgust in the audience, as they confronted the contradiction embedded in the imagery.

Marco and Antropova: It seems to us that the acoustic landscape of the performance was very creative, and unique: whispering, shouting, hammering, even using the microphone to amplify and, perhaps, distort Serapio's monologue about Sol, etc. What was the importance of sounds in this performance?

X: The entire production was initially designed to oppress the audience, and I was risking a lot by making the audience uncomfortable: from their entrance surrounded by beggars to their rigid seats, and to loud sounds. The latter was intentional; we wanted to bombard and to disturb the audience until everything subsides into the song. When the song comes it was a soothing feeling that there is still that sliver of hope and love somewhere there in this Hell. Thus, the acoustic landscape was designed from loudness to a soothing song and then to silence.

Marco and Antropova: When Serapio takes the doll in his hands, you used a "never-ending" song, which was gradually amplified and sang by all the actors and then one woman-singer. This is a very powerful technique which brings the show to another level: humanity. What is this song for you?

X: To be honest, this was not planned. I discovered this along the way. I first used this song in the 2010 production, but I improved it in the 2018 version where there was a single woman singing that song. First you know how artists work; you follow your gut and then the meaning just comes to you as in a *Eureka* moment. Initially I did not have any reason to using it, but since there were too many loud noises, I wanted to give Serapio his moment of reflection, his moment of despair, his last moment of grasping for hope. To do so I used the lines of the *pulubi* (beggar) from the play's script to write a melody. I wrote the melody, and I wanted it to be creepy.

It starts in a minor key which is so eerie, almost like a horror movie, and then it becomes a love song. When a single female voice takes over, it becomes a sad lullaby. It engulfs a wide range of meanings: a woman Serapio loves, a mother still present, an abandoned child's abode, the mother singing to her daughter, Serapio's happy memories. On a philosophical level, this song explores the tension between individuality and homogeneity. I am particularly interested in how the individual can become subsumed within collective noise, ultimately losing a distinct sense of self. In my conceptualization of hell, identity is entirely obliterated—there is no self, only an indistinct mass of filth. In contrast, heaven represents the celebration and perfection of individual virtues, where uniqueness is preserved rather than erased.

The emergence of a singular voice within the noise is a deliberate gesture toward this idea, though I do not expect audiences to consciously interpret it. Whether or not this symbolic element is intellectually grasped is secondary; what matters to me is its emotional resonance and how it is felt by the audience. In my mind the song felt like a respite from all the noise, one single voice escaping from the collective voice, and then Serapio sinking into his memory through that song.

We intended this song to be a magical moment separate from the cruelty of the play, the momentum of peace, love, and beauty.

Marco and Antropova: Another question about the acoustic landscape of the play. Was the prolonged and extremely loud hammering of a chest (offstage) supposed to create the climax of the play, even though Serapio is not blinded yet?

X: I learned this approach from my mentor, the renowned filmmaker Marilou Diaz-Abaya. Prior to working in theatre, I spent a decade in the film industry as her assistant director. She taught us the significance of rhythm and music in film, particularly how the rhythm of the cuts can influence the audience's emotional and physiological responses, even affecting their heartbeat. While theatre lacks the editing techniques available in film, I have adapted similar principles through other theatrical devices to simulate that effect. I build toward a crescendo to elicit not only the sensation of oppression but also the overwhelming impact of noise, wherein rhythm emerges as a function of that auditory intensity. This rhythmic build-up was intentionally crafted to prepare the audience for a climactic reveal. Initially, the effect might seem jarring, but it intensified progressively to provoke a visceral reaction manipulating emotional tension through sound and pacing. This was the purpose of the percussive elements, which culminated in an explosive moment upon the reveal.

Marco and Antropova: The ending of the play seems incomplete: the audience kept silent awaiting continuation of the performance. Was it intentional?

X: I think it was a combination of a couple of things. First, Paul told me that in the original ending of the book he did not include the final

monologue of Interrogator 1. Thus, the play ended with the blinding scene, and then the jury and other beggars left the stage and at the end there was an empty stage tableau. I imagine it was a quiet sort of ending. However, the final monologue was added later after the playwright was struck by one actor's exceptional performance. Dumol chose to expand his role by writing additional lines, allowing the actor greater opportunity to further showcase his talents.

To me, at least fifty years later, the final monologue felt as an attempt to justify their act. When Interrogator 1 finished his speech, the audience was too angry to forgive him. This is the reason why it feels incomplete because there was no forgiveness and there was no one to give the audience some sort of closure. What happened to Serapio afterwards? What happened to the court? We end here; justice was not served. As I was aware of that I let them sit on it for a while and then opened the floor for a conversation to try and alleviate their psychological pain, outrage, and the sense of incompleteness.

Marco and Antropova: How does this play align with Philippine national spirit?

X: First, the language of the play, Filipino, is a blend of colloquial street language and classical Filipino, which creates both resonance and a sense of linguistic elevation. The text is beautifully written, containing lines that verge on poetry. To subtly integrate this poetic quality into performance, I chose to split some of the verse lines between Interrogators 1 and 2. In the original script, Interrogator 2 had very few lines; by redistributing the dialogue, it appears as though Interrogator 2 is simply completing Interrogator 1's thoughts. However, these are single lines of poetry divided between the two characters. This technique preserves the lyrical nature of the text while embedding it within the rhythm of interrogation. The language, along with cultural

elements such as depictions of slum life and beggars, figures visible even in urban business districts, firmly roots the play in the socio-cultural realities of the Philippines. It is sad to say that it was a reality in the 1980s. Although it was the second golden age of Philippine cinema, we had a lot of poverty porn. That was Filipino culture. There were a lot of films based on poverty porn which were shown at international festivals, making it a Filipino brand, an image of ourselves. Therefore, *Ang Paglilitis ni Mang Serapio* resonates with the Filipinos. We are extremely poor; you see that in Payatas, in the Smoky Mountain, you see that at the fringes of Makati. As for the beggars' syndicates, I am not sure if they are still prevalent, but they do exist. One can still see a lot of beggars in the streets selling sampaguita.

Because of this play, I started seeing beggars carrying their babies in a different light. I can see a lot of them are using their siblings, their children, as props, because it will make them earn more money. Unfortunately, it is our sad reality. Furthermore, as the play **per se** lacks values, it makes the audience try to convince themselves that we are not like that, that we have compassion, that we take care of family. Serapio is an exception in this play since he has profound feelings towards his deceased family, his wife and his daughter. And this does resonate with the Filipinos. We appreciate our family the most and support each other. We have huge families, and we consider even our second and third cousins part of the close family. Serapio is hanging on to the last threads of the semblance of a family and, thus, he represents Filipino culture. The character of Serapio embodies deeply held values, particularly the self-sacrificial devotion of a parent, who is willing to endure anything, even death, for the sake of his child.

Marco and Antropova: The most popular reading of this play is "social injustice." However, the playwright assured that one of the themes that he had in mind for this play is a curt line from New Testament (the first

letter of St. John) "Deus caritas est" (God is Love). Do you see God's love in this play?

X: As I have already mentioned, the play presents quite the opposite to reinforce the statement, God is love. As a creative team, we were very conscious about the design of the space to make sure that God is not there. We painted Dante's *Inferno*. Although the place was small, there was a tall ceiling, so we hung debris from the ceiling to create the sensation that something was falling from above. There were pieces of wood, chairs, etc., which were suspended in the air. The reflection of these objects by the light from the second floor cast a shadow of a cross. Furthermore, there was a lot of vandalism on the walls of the room, we also wrote phrases about love and its absence on the walls. As for the beggars' costumes, they represented the seven deadly sins. For instance, one of the beggars was costumed to represent the sin of gluttony, with food wrappers affixed to her clothing and continuous eating as part of her performance. This was further emphasized through the subtle characterization of the actors, which was a deliberate and conscious choice. For example, Interrogator 1 was designed to embody the sin of pride, evident in his self-assured handling of the case and his assertive projection of authority. Each character was intentionally associated with a particular sin, contributing to a broader conceptual framework. The production was thus structured to represent hell, aligning with the overarching thesis that "God is love," a theological contrast underscoring the absence of divine love in the world depicted on stage.

The only moment when God is present is the song. That moment for me is the intersection of all the elements, that part is beautiful, peaceful, and soothing in contrast to other parts of the play which are evil, fragmented, and cruel. In the moment of the song, one catches a glimpse of God there. Some members of the cast would ask me whether

the audience would perceive or understand the deeper layers of meaning in the performance. My response was always the same: what matters most is that the audience *feels* it. They do not need to articulate these elements intellectually; what is essential is the emotional and aesthetic resonance. This is a lesson I learned from Paul: true artistic insight often emerges long after the initial encounter. One may come to realize the significance of a powerful performance a week later, a month later, or even a decade after experiencing it. Therefore, one should not be overly concerned with immediate comprehension or rational interpretation. Beauty reveals itself in its own time. If a work is truly beautiful, its meaning will unfold eventually and inevitably.

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