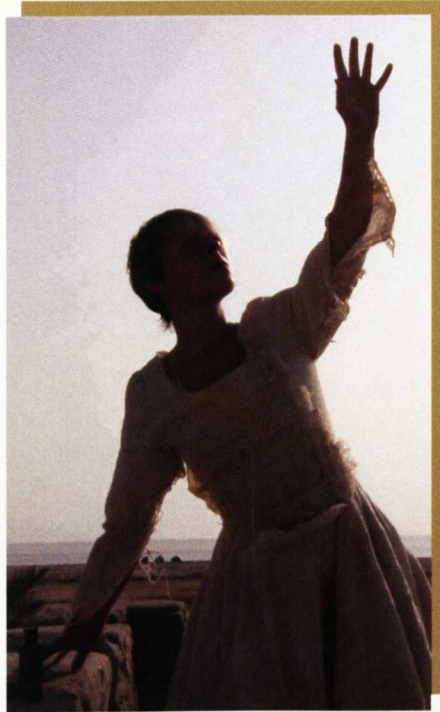


# Theatre as Transformative Practice



A heuristic exploration of the psychosomatic dynamics of  
self-expressive theatre practices

By Jessica Bockler

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requirements of Liverpool John Moores University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**“My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my comprehension.”**

**(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 273)**

“God knows what you know and what you know appears as your reality.”

“Your life is not about what your body is doing. Yet it is true that what your body is doing is a reflection of what your life is about. Another divine paradox.”

### The Other



“This is a story of many struggles, challenges and discoveries. It is the story of my journey into the unknown, stripping away the everyday me and discovering sparks of the uniqueness that is truly Jessica. This is a story about how I grew, how I became lost, how I rediscovered myself and how I continue to bring that which I carry within to its fuller expression. As I immersed myself in ocean that lies beyond my ordinary egoic experience I became profoundly aware of that which is the Other and that which is truly me. In celebrating the Other ... I honour myself and the unique vision which I bring to this world.”

Jessica Bockler

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# Abstract

An exploration into the psychosomatic dynamics of theatre-based practices was undertaken using heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990). Twenty-two practitioners, some working independently, others working collaboratively, were interviewed about their approaches, focusing on their experiences of self-expressive performance as a way to work on the self and to induce healing and/or transformative growth. The heuristic approach also allowed for the researcher's direct involvement and participation in the practices under investigation, enabling her to explore firsthand the potential of theatre-based practice as a means to work on the self.

Following heuristic methodology, the researcher created a Composite Depiction and a Creative Synthesis, juxtaposing the individual approaches of the research participants and highlighting the core elements of Theatre as a Transformative Practice. In doing so, she proposed that the practices explored facilitate an attunement of ego, some leading to deep, body-based introspection which in turn enables the practitioner to gain greater self-insight and internal balance through expressive engagement with felt senses and corresponding imagery. The researcher further suggested that Theatre as a Transformative Practice requires specific conditions under which the creative journey can lead to healing and personal growth. The chief condition identified was that the work be approached with mindful awareness of others and self in the performative relationship.

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# Chapter One

The personal, autobiographic style of this PhD thesis may catch the reader by surprise. In mainstream psychological research it has been regarded as unconventional for studies to be driven by the first-person perspective, although this appears to be rapidly changing (see Chapter 2). Not only is this PhD project grounded in a heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990) which champions an inner-oriented, holistic and participatory approach, it also enters terrain - such as body work and contemplative practice - where personal engagement may be the only method through which a real understanding of the phenomena under investigation can be achieved. Where traditional methods advocate that the researcher maintain a distant and neutral stance towards the investigation, the heuristic method invites the researcher to become personally involved and to live the research question "in waking, sleeping, and even dream states" (p. 28). As such, the heuristic method necessitates both a deep engagement with the study's participants and a journey of "self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery" (p. 11); and the research question, methodology and results "flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (ibid).

Inevitably, the subjective approach of the heuristic method has its strengths and weaknesses and brings with it a range of challenges. It has been my aim throughout this research project and thesis both to honour the method and assess candidly its potential and pitfalls. The reader will find an in-depth review of my approach in Chapters 2 and 7.

# Introduction

Theatre anthropologists (e.g. Turner, 1987) suggest that cultural performances are not simply reflective of social systems, but that the relationship between the two domains is reflexive and reciprocal. Cultural performances are the “active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting 'designs for living'” (p. 24). In Europe and America, theatre has been employed as a potent tool for social and political change (e.g. Boal, 1992, 2008; Fox, 1999; Sainer, 1975;). Dramatic approaches have also been used extensively in therapeutic and personal development contexts (e.g. Jennings et al, 1994; Røine, 1997); and in mainstream performance approaches a growing line of actor-trainers and theatre directors have been striving to engage actors (and audiences) in such a way that they are personally transformed (e.g. Brook, 1968, 1993; Grotowski, 1991; Schechner, 1977, 1985). As far as the transformative impact of theatre practice upon the actor is concerned, Christoffersen (1993) asserts that there seems little doubt that “actors change with their roles. [...] Repetition of the actor's work, training and performance reality leads [sic] to a transformation and permits a development in spite of well-defined rules, norms and habits” (p. 161).

Since the inauguration of the journal *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts* in 2000, there has been a flurry of writing, linking theatre studies and consciousness studies, illustrating that theatre “can be a spiritual practice, a means of reaching higher levels of consciousness” (Brask & Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2010). A number of pertinent essays have explored such topics as ego and self in actor training (e.g. Weiss, 2000), how dreams, rituals and the Sacred may be approached through theatre (e.g. McCutcheon, 2001) and how theatre practice can be a means to inner liberation and awakening (e.g. Malekin & Yarrow, 2000). Parallels between theatre practice and spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism (e.g. Daboo, 2007) and the Advaita Vedanta (e.g. Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2003), have also been traced, furthermore relating performance practice to cutting edge research in psychology, ritual studies, anthropology and even quantum physics.

In line with such research, this PhD project sought to explore in-depth the psychosomatic dynamics and transformative potential of several theatre-based practices, mapping the journey of the actor as he endeavours to work on himself.

## **Into the Labyrinth of Heuristic Self-search**

“All heuristic inquiry begins with the internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, a passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one’s own identity and selfhood. The awakening of such a question comes through an inward clearing, and an intentional readiness and determination to discover a fundamental truth regarding the meaning and essence of one’s own experience and that of others” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 40).

In the spirit of Moustakas’ approach to the Heuristic Inquiry I have chosen to introduce the topic of this thesis from an autobiographical perspective. In the following I shall trace my journey towards Theatre as a Transformative Practice and in doing so, begin to introduce relevant material from the literature.

My interest in theatre and its potential for personal transformation has its roots in a free spirited and creative childhood. In my teens, spent in a small village in West Germany, I lived in worlds of poetry and fantasy novels, I loved and devoured German literature in all its forms, expressive, political, romantic, philosophic. I read and I wrote. I also practiced theatre, dance and gymnastics. At the heart of all my doings was play. I played outdoors in the fields and still built huts and climbed trees when my friends became interested ‘in all things adult’ and went to parties and pubs. I lived in a world of magical realism in which imagination and everyday life were intimately entwined. I was the heroine of my magical life, fought Ork-resembling bullies on the way to school, time-travelled during breaks (and boring lessons) and saved the world, family and friends from disasters on the way home. When challenges arose and hardships struck I found that imaginative play helped me cope and rise above and beyond the suffering and pain. It allowed me to see and grow towards new horizons and new potentials, both magical and real. I discovered that what I envisioned could become real. And so, my creative powers became my quest and driving purpose.

## **Avoiding Paralysis by Analysis**

Following the completion of my A-Levels in May 1995 I enrolled at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster to study German Literature, Linguistics and Philosophy. Within months I knew that I was in the wrong place. I loved literature and philosophy ... however, the German university system was killing that which I loved so dearly in dreary academic dissection and I wanted no part in such destructive a venture. Disassembling poems, novels and novella, I sensed that I was in danger of uprooting and tearing apart my own creative life. Whilst academic work suited my intellectual capabilities, I intuited that it would endanger my access

to the world of living imagination, and I knew with little uncertainty that my path was not one of analysis but of soulful appreciation, expression and creation. Thus I chose to play and to create. A few months into my studies in Münster I applied for a place at the newly founded Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) and my desire seemed in resonance with Universal Will. I was amongst eleven of several thousand German applicants who were offered a place. In September 1996 I moved to the UK.

## Following Playful Openings

In 1997, one year into my training at LIPA I came in contact with *Centre de Médiation et de Formation à la Médiation* (CMFM), a renowned conflict resolution centre in Paris. Under the lead of Jacqueline Morineau, CMFM pursues a transformative model of conflict resolution, advocating transcendence of a conflict over following the mainstream path of negotiated settlement and compromise (see Bockler, 1999). For two years I journeyed with CMFM, participating in intense bursts of residential mediation trainings in Italy, Luxembourg and France. At the core of Jacqueline's training approach were simulated mediations, role plays which tapped into the underlying, universal dynamics of any human conflict. Each simulation began as the imaginative interaction of two trainees as adversaries with three trainees as mediators. Each simulation opened the door and led the role-playing trainees to their own inner struggles and tensions ... and beyond.

“Mediation provides a time and place for coming face to face with disorder and violence. In this way, it becomes the stage on which the drama is to be acted out, as there is indeed drama when two violent forces come together. The drama is on several levels: social, cultural, ethnic, between generations, with the 'other'. But also within ourselves” (Morineau, in Bockler, 1999, p. 5).

As I played my way from conflict to transcendence, repeatedly slipping into the roles of both adversary and mediator, I began to see the underlying connections between playful performance and transformation. Jacqueline likened the mediator to a Socratic midwife, asserting that mediators “bring out people's potential. By helping people to know themselves better, mediators enable them to realise their ability to find their own way in life” (ibid, pp. 28 - 29). I discovered that the role-playing mediator was as much a midwife as the ‘real’ mediator and that the simulation of a conflict resolution could as much heal and transform the adversaries as could any real mediation. Our simulations were improvisational performances in which the trainees played fictive characters which as the performances progressed became firmly grounded in trainees' own inner lives. In theatre, actors, directors and scholars have long explored and analysed the nature of the performer's emotional involvement with the fictive character. Psychologist Elly Konijn (2000) affirms that the issue concerns “*the degree of*

similarity between the emotions of the actor and his character” (p. 21). According to Konijn, the Western performer has three major acting styles at his disposal, each proposing a unique solution to the actor’s task: these are the styles of *involvement*, *detachment* and *self-expression*.

“In line with *involvement* (e.g. Stanislavski or Strasberg) the actor’s emotions must match the character’s emotions; at best the actor transcends his own will and ‘lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively’ (Stanislavski, 1986, p. 13). In *detachment* (e.g. Brecht) on the other hand the actor does not merge with the emotions of his character, but rather he demonstrates them, so that both actor and character are clearly visible to the audience. As Boysen affirms, ‘a happy character does not need to be played by a happy actor’ (cited in Konijn, 2000, p. 39). Finally, in *self-expression* (e.g. Grotowski) the actor remains true to his own emotions. He does not live the fictive part, but rather he uses his character to explore and expose the inner workings of his psyche” (Bockler, 2006).

Looking back today I would propose that CMFM’s training simulations resembled self-expressive performances. The conflicts chosen for our training were always grounded in the experience of at least one of the two trainees playing the adversaries. The other trainee would fill in the vacant role which would initially not relate to his or her own experience. However, as the mediations progressed the ‘fictive character’ would become rooted in the inner life of the role-playing trainee; and the simulation scenario became a gateway, allowing all trainees present to tap into a deeper, collective, perhaps archetypal level of human experience. I remember that my experiences as trainee in those simulations were marked by profound states of inner opening and empathy, engendering compassion and love, a deep knowing of the ‘other’, and feelings of oneness with the ‘other’. There was no doubt that CMFM trainings were a work on the self from which I emerged more grounded and more aware each time; and it was through these training encounters that I began to uncover more of the power of my own expanding creative practice: I glimpsed the performing arts’ potential for evoking healing growth and self-actualisation within others and myself. I shall later relate my experience of CMFM to the fields of drama therapy and psychodrama, both of which have been of great relevance to my PhD research. It is perhaps important to mention here that for some time I failed to acknowledge and explore their relevance - because I was more interested in theatre as a spiritual path rather than a therapeutic practice. I shall illuminate and evaluate this differentiation when I come to reflect on the therapeutic dimensions of theatre in both the literature review and the depictions of the research results. Suffice to say here that the parallels of particularly drama therapy to my early mediation trainings are resounding.

During my time at LIPA and with CMFM I also learned more about the potential of embodied and intermodal creative play. As a young writer I had experienced moments of liberating and

cathartic reverie when immersed in the creation of a poem or story, often spoken aloud and enacted in the privacy of my bedroom. As an emerging performing artist I began to discover how (interpersonal) play with body and movement could spark such reverie, and how visual imagery in form of scenic backdrops and costume could build a bridge, giving form to that which lay just beyond the grasp of words. In the language of psychotherapist Natalie Rogers (1993), the pioneering advocate of *Person-centred Expressive Arts Therapy*, I had begun to discover *the creative connection*.

“Movement, art, writing, sound, and meditation intertwine in the flowing river of creativity. If we think of creativity as our deep well, we can see that sometimes it becomes still and stagnant. Movement can stir the waters, unblock the source, and allow the spring to come bubbling up. The visual arts allow those bubbling waters to manifest into color, shape, and form. Those shapes, forms, and colors may be dark, threatening whirlpools or languid streams or brilliant waterfalls. Free writing becomes the voice of the stream, as do sounding and music. It is possible to dance the poem, sing the art, and write the whole journey. This is the creative connection” (p. 92).

My practice expanded as I facilitated play within others, young and old, privileged and socially excluded. Under the auspices of CMFM I facilitated theatre workshops with young mediators from all over Europe which culminated in *Medi-Act*, a multi-lingual performance of a mediation between a Kosovar and a Serb which was performed in Italy at the height of the Kosovo Conflict in 1999. Following my graduation from LIPA I started working in Community Arts in the UK, facilitating creative play in a multitude of settings - from schools, community centres, libraries and museums to supermarkets, McDonalds outlets, public parks and forests.

## **Exploring Transformation**

I intuited much of the transformative impact of my work. However, apart from completing project evaluations and reports which were serving the interests of my commissioners, I did not extensively explore the effects of theatre upon practitioners and audiences. From a young age I had caught profound glimpses of the true nature of creativity as a universal driving force of growth and I had begun to articulate the meaning and potential of this force - articulations which were nurtured in dialogue with my father who always seemed on the same wavelength where such topics as consciousness, modern physics and spirituality were concerned. Nonetheless, I sensed that greater refinement of my grasp was needed. I wanted to learn more about the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of my playful, self-expressive practice - if only so that I could facilitate my work with others in a more conscious, informed and responsible way. And so from 2002 to 2004 I participated in the MSc programme in ‘Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology’ at Liverpool John Moores University.



The Masters programme became my gateway to the world of Transpersonal Psychology and Consciousness Studies, both of which tremendously deepened my intellectual insight into the transformative potential of creative practice. In my Masters thesis (Bockler, 2004) I embarked on a Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) into *The Essence of Play*, exploring the phenomenon with the help of nine performing arts students based at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, who became my co-researchers. At the time I was convinced that “[T]here is a *transpersonal* dimension to play. It reaches beyond the *personal* into the most profound domains of the human experience. It is directly involved with peak experiences, unitive states of consciousness, mystical experiences, even personal transformation” (Bockler, 2004, p. 7). From the research emerged a multi-faceted depiction of play, which indeed highlighted the phenomenon’s transportative and transformative effects on the player’s state of being - many of which seemed akin to peak experiences and mystical states. Centrally, my co-researchers differentiated between two different modes of play which, so they claimed, existed side by side: *acting* and *performing*. Whilst acting seemed to promote egoic states of consciousness, performing seemed to facilitate an expansion, even a transcendence of the egoic self, leading to heightened levels of insight and more authentic expression.

Play as acting “is 'putting on a mask' and it is 'slipping into fake Personas'. The co-researchers liken 'acting' to social role play, with one distinct difference: Whilst social roles might be grounded in personal circumstances, theatrical roles often involve situations, which actors have never experienced. Still, to fill the gap, actors have to draw from their own experiences. Overall, 'acting' is masked play which is not necessarily true to the player” (ibid, p. 52).

“Play as 'performing' is authentic and it comes from within. It is a passionate sharing, a sacred gift to an audience, which often aims to induce transformation. When 'performing' the co-researchers feel they remain true to themselves. They do not become someone else. Performance is an expression of the within. Some of the co-researchers even see it as an expression of a world 'beyond within'. Such performance is mediumistic play, spiritual, magical, ritualistic. It connects the player to 'something else', another layer of reality” (ibid).

Reflecting on their sense of self during play, the co-researchers reported feeling self-conscious and head-centred whilst acting. “A part of the actor slips on a mask, whilst the other part watches on, much like an external observer. This observer is very self-conscious and often makes negative, doubtful, critical comments. During the act, the character (the mask) never takes over. The sense of self is located in the 'head' or the 'back of the head” (ibid, p. 53). In contrast, when performing, the co-researchers recalled expanded states of awareness and even transcendence of self: “The co-researchers describe a state of flow, in which they are not critically aware, but rather comfortably *selfless*. Their 'I' seems to disappear into another world. [...] Their concentration is heightened, their awareness expanded. During this state of

flow, the co-researchers' minds perceive deeper patterns and connections - but there is no 'thinking ahead'" (ibid, p. 54).

In their articulation of play as performance the co-researchers' depictions were strongly reminiscent of Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) research into peak states which he came to describe as *being in flow*. The co-researchers' experiences of performance featured: a freedom from the inhibitions of self-consciousness, an altered sense of time which seemed to "'speed up', 'fly by' or 'disappear'" (Bockler, 2004, p. 54), enhanced perception, heightened bodily control and a sense of self which extended throughout and sometimes even beyond the body. Along similar lines, Csikszentmihalyi has suggested that being in flow entails a merging of activity and awareness, a heightened sense of control over action, a distorted sense of time, a temporary loss of ordinary self-awareness whilst the self is still fully functioning and at times even a transcendence of self, for example when "the climber feels at one with the mountain" (1988, p. 33).

In their depictions of play as performance the co-researchers touched upon the somatic dimensions of creative activity, suggesting that play resembled the creation of a virtual reality and that performed emotions could become physiologically real. "There is a connection to 'belief'. If you believe in the played emotion, positive or negative, then it will manifest in the body" (Bockler, 2004, p. 55). During the research for my Masters thesis little did I know that, where creativity and the body were concerned, I had only begun to scratch the surface. Whilst the Masters degree deepened my intellectual insight into creativity and play it would take a six-year PhD journey with extensive immersive practice to enable me to expand this insight beyond the bounds of the intellect into the realms of the body, thus grounding it in the psychosomatic levels of my being where the inner and the outer, the psychological and the physical, merge in what Jung called the *psychoid* reality (e.g. in Meier, 2001, p. 126). We shall come to explore notions of the psychoid realm in greater depth in the literature review. Today, I find that the psychosomatic dimension of creativity, and my immersive experience of it, has become one of the central avenues, leading me towards new insights in my PhD research, as well as ushering in personal transformation.

My Masters research further highlighted the paradoxical nature of play which revealed itself as "fun and yet earnest, [...] chaotic and yet harmonious, competitive and yet co-operative, impulsive and yet structured, repeatable and yet unique, [...] controlled but free, an illusion which is also real..." (Bockler, 2004, p. 56). Notions of play as paradox seemed to bring creative practice into strong resonance with mystical traditions. As Lancaster (2004) affirms, when it comes to the teachings of Meister Eckhart or ibn Arabi, "revelation of secrets can only occur in a manner that results in their re-concealment. Paradox is the path to enlightenment" (pp. 229-30). Ultimately, the mystical goal is not one of removing all veils, which hinder us

from knowing, but "one of consciously engaging with the inner workings of creation, where the *concealing-revealing-concealing* dynamic operates" (p. 231). Along similarly lines, Katz (1992) suggests that mystical practices frequently draw upon the use of linguistic play in "the conscious construction of paradoxes whose necessary violation of the laws of logic are intended to shock, even shatter, the standard epistemic security of 'disciples', thereby allowing them to move to new and higher forms of insight/ knowledge" (p. 7).

I concluded my Masters thesis by proposing that the human being is as much a *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga, 1955/1997) as it is a *Homo Sapiens*, and that play was intrinsic to the creation of human reality. I suggested that this process of creation was driven by a two-way dynamic of play concerned with the generation of meaning, as well as with the breakdown and reassembly of meaning. Whilst the former would enable the formation of a conscious self and storyline the latter would foster human growth and evolution through the deautomatisation of egoic patterns and the resulting emergence of new insight and knowledge.

"Just as play might enable us to collapse multiplicity [as found in preconscious processing, Lancaster, 2004] into actuality and to hence create [egoic] meaning and also re-enforce it (e.g. *mastery play* à la Piaget, 1951), play might help us to break down meaning and to re-connect with multiplicity and ambiguity ... for the purpose of fostering increased self-knowledge and renewed self-understanding. [...] The two-way dynamic of play - creation of meaning versus breakdown of meaning - can also be related to Carl Jung's concept of personal development or *individuation* (e.g. Daniels, 1992), which proceeds in two major stages: The first, the *initiation into outward reality* might draw extensively from play as a meaning making process, whilst the second, the *initiation into inner reality* might involve the breakdown of established meanings - only to lead to 'the meaningful unification of all aspects and opposites within the psyche' (ibid, pp. 103/4) - i.e. only to result in enhanced meaning and self-realisation" (Bockler, 2004, pp. 67 - 68).

## Discovering the Research Question

My Masters research into the nature and essence of play became the personal and academic gateway to my PhD research. It was play as performance - authentic, self-expressive and revelatory - which drew my interest. I felt compelled to explore performance as a transformative practice, to examine its psychological and psychosomatic impact, and to investigate its efficacy as a path towards self-refinement and self-actualisation. As such, I articulated my research question as follows:

**"What are the psychosomatic dynamics of self-expressive performance practices?"**

## **Choosing the Research Method**

Following my first and very fulfilling engagement with Moustakas' (1990) heuristic inquiry during my Masters research, I intuited that the heuristic path would also offer me the right framework in which to conduct my PhD research. I knew that the Heuristic inquiry which by its very nature involved "self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11) would enable me to work intuitively and creatively and that it would allow me to become deeply immersed in the 'object of my research' which was also of deep personal concern.

# Chapter 2

## Methodology

“The idea of investigating the last frontier may create images of climbing to the heights of rugged mountain peaks [...], of developing far more powerful telescopes to peer into the farthest reaches of outer space or intricately developed microscopes to probe the center of an atom. But I believe there is a terra incognita that may be far more available for human inquiry than any of these places. This final frontier, I propose, is the interiority of our experience, where feeling, which may previously not have been noticed as significant, is not just a core component of the terrain but the dominant one [...], despite the profound efforts of the intellect to alter this reality” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 54).

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conventional inquiry methods in psychological research focused on the objective and uninvolved description, definition and prediction of the objects of their research. Quantitative methods were favoured over qualitative approaches which were “recommended only as interim strategies that might provide suggestions or hints for later quantitative and/or experimental determinations” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 5). It was the general assumption that valid knowledge of the world could only be obtained through neutral observation of external phenomena. As such, a researcher’s ideal stance was “to be as neutral, uninvolved, and distant as possible” (ibid), and the ideal research environment was one which was “isolated from other influences and characterized by simple sets of variables or events whose mutual interactions can be straightforwardly analyzed to determine sources and directions of causality” (ibid).

Over the past three decades researchers in the human sciences have become increasingly aware of the limitations of conventional research practices (e.g. Polkinghorne, 1983; Tesch, 1990). Braud and Anderson (1998) assert that a complementary, transpersonal research paradigm has begun to emerge which “can more adequately apprehend the complexity, breadth, and depth of our world and of humanity” (p. 6) by offering a less constrained, less fragmented and more meaningful picture of human nature and potential. Braud and Anderson describe the emerging paradigm as participatory, integrative, inner-oriented and intuitive. Within this complementary paradigm qualitative, process-oriented research methods, although not privileged over quantitative approaches, come to the fore, embracing the subjective experiences of the research participants and the researcher, as well as their dialectical relationship, as a fundamental aspect of the inquiry process.

Moreover, within this alternative paradigm a number of research methods have evolved which emphasise the value of alternative modes of knowing, e.g. Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 1998), Organic Research (Clements, 2004), and Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), the research method which has been employed in this PhD research project. Within these approaches “[R]eality is contacted through physical sense data, but also [...] through a deep intuitive inner knowing. Awareness includes (objective) sensation as well as (subjective) intuitive, aesthetic, spiritual, noetic, and mystical aspects. Understanding comes [...] from identifying with the observed, becoming one with it” and the “entire spectra of states of consciousness are of interest, including religious and mystical experiences” (ibid, pp. 10 - 11) - a notion echoed by Tart (1972) who advocated the development of *state-specific* sciences, suggesting that non-ordinary states of consciousness are likely to yield new insights which are not accessible by conventional methods.

Alongside alternative modes of knowing these new research methods embrace an extended range of tools for data collection and analysis, allowing the researcher to engage with his topic in a holistic, deeply embodied and immersive way. As Moustakas (1990) puts it, the researcher “lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states” (p. 28). The researcher’s immersion in his research topic may include active engagement with the practices of research participants (e.g. through workshops and seminars), contemplative and meditative practice, body work, dream analysis, and work with symbols, myths and metaphors, highlighting the creative dimensions of the complementary research approaches.

## **The Heuristic Inquiry**

### **- Origins, Concept & Principles**

The term *heuristic* originates from the Greek verb *εὕρισκω* (*euriskō*) which means ‘I find’, ‘I discover’. Heuristic principles have been employed in mathematics and computer sciences (Polya, 1945), “to identify the mental operations or procedures one moves through in the process of solving problems” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 58). Sela-Smith elucidates,

“Heuristics can be used in any science, in any research endeavor where the inquiry is on the cutting edge of new territory being explored. When there is no idea of where the researcher or the territory is going (i.e., there is no paradigm established for the field), then exploratory discovery, rather than testing hypotheses, is the goal. The inquiry is open-ended with only the initial question as the guide. ‘What works’ becomes the focus, and anything that makes sense can be tested. This trial-and-error process, this discovery of what works, is the heuristic” (ibid).

Moustakas' heuristic inquiry which forms the basis for this PhD project arose as an adaptation of phenomenological research which seeks to explore the pre-reflective, lived structure of a phenomenon, as well as its conscious meaning, by illuminating it through "first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience" (1990, p. 38). The heuristic inquiry deviates from the traditional phenomenological paradigm in that it actively encourages the researcher to connect to and to immerse himself in the human concern or issue under investigation. From the beginning, the research process involves the researcher's "self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (ibid, p. 11), highlighting the personal, participatory, intuitive and reciprocal nature of the approach. Moustakas asserts that the outcome of such investigation is not only that human knowledge is extended but that "the self of the researcher is illuminated" (ibid). In its emphasis of *knowing through participation*, the heuristic inquiry echoes Ferrer's (2002) depiction of the *participatory turn* in qualitative and particularly transpersonal research, which, as Hiles (2002, p. 2) suggests, is directly related to the notions of *participatory consciousness* (Berman, 1981) and *participatory theology* (Heron, 1998). Moreover, whilst traditional phenomenology concludes with an objective distillation of the structure of a certain experience, the heuristic quest culminates in a creative synthesis which is imbued with personal significance. "Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43).

Moustakas' heuristic inquiry bears strong resemblance to a number of transpersonal research methods, notably Lived Inquiry (Heron, 1998) and Mindful Inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Hiles (2001) goes so far as to assert that many transpersonal research methods are variants of the heuristic inquiry process: "...heuristic inquiry and phenomenological inquiry are both foundational to this whole area of research. Although heuristic inquiry is not of necessity transpersonal, it has a central role to play in the research into transpersonal and spiritual issues" (p. 8). In describing the evolution of his approach, Moustakas acknowledges Maslow's (1956, 1966, 1971) research on self-actualisation as an important influence. He also points to the significance of Polanyi's elucidations of the tacit dimension (Polanyi, 1964, 1966, 1969) and of indwelling and personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1962), to Buber's (1958, 1961, 1965) explorations of relationship as *I-Thou*, to Bridgman's (1950) delineations of subjective-objective truth, and to Gendlin's (1962) analysis of experience and the creation of meaning.

## - Processes of Knowing

The heuristic inquiry involves *knowing* through all channels open to the human experience. "Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 10). Moustakas identifies the following processes of knowing as being central to the inquiry:

- ◆ **The Inverted Perspective** ... is an identification with the object of research or a 'knowing through becoming'. The researcher becomes immersed in the phenomenon to be investigated; s/he becomes one with it and hence achieves an understanding of it.
  
- ◆ **Dialogue & Self-Dialogue** ... facilitate the research process. The researcher moves from the self to the other back to the self, so to understand the wholeness and unique patterns of the phenomenon investigated. "Douglass and Moustakas (1985) also stress the value of self-disclosure: 'At the heart of heuristics lies an emphasis on disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others - a response to the tacit dimension within oneself sparks a similar call from others'" (Moustakas, 1990, p.17).
  
- ◆ **Tacit Knowing** ... is at the root of heuristic discovery. All acts of comprehension involve a knowing, which is partially ineffable. We know more than we can tell. We sense the wholeness of something, by grasping its individual qualities or parts. Polanyi (1964), whose impact on Moustakas cannot be underestimated, suggests that tacit knowing is enabled through *subsidiary* and *focal* factors of perception. The former are the explicit "invariant constituents" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 21) of an experience, which enter into conscious awareness, whilst the latter are the hidden, implicit elements which enable a sense of wholeness. Heuristic researchers particularly explore the focal elements of an experience, as they are potential sources of untapped meaning.
  
- ◆ **Intuition** ... is the bridge between the implicit and the explicit dimensions of knowing. It is a vital tool for the heuristic researcher, for it enables him to utilise the tacit dimension, in order to grasp the underlying patterns and dynamics of an experience.
  
- ◆ **Indwelling** ... is an essential process in the elucidation of the experience investigated. It is utter attunement to the experience.

"To understand something fully, one dwells inside the subsidiary and focal factors to draw from them every possible nuance, texture, fact, and meaning. The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate. [...] It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved" (ibid, p. 24).



Hiles (2002) suggests that indwelling emphasises the participatory nature of tacit knowing and that it can act as a gateway to transpersonal, collective knowing. Similarly Douglass and Moustakas (1985) assert that

“Beyond the pale of ordinary conscious awareness, every person is in touch with numberless sources of knowledge. Subliminal, archetypal, and preconscious perceptions undergird all that is in our immediate awareness, giving energy, distinctiveness, form, and direction to that which we know” (p. 49).

- ◆ **Focusing** ... is a process of paying attention unwaveringly to the essence of an experience, to remove external clutter and to allow for a deepening of insight and meaning. In his description of the process, Moustakas cites Gendlin’s (1978) therapeutic strategy of focusing: “Focusing facilitates a relaxed and receptive state, enables perceptions and sensings to achieve more definitive clarification, taps into the essence of what matters, and sets aside peripheral qualities or feelings” (1990, p. 25).
- ◆ All heuristic research relates back to an **Internal Frame of Reference**. The researcher's understanding of the phenomenon is at the heart of the inquiry process; and his perceptions, beliefs and judgements form the underlying current and dynamics of the inquiry. Whilst Moustakas highlights the researcher’s internal frame of reference as central to the research process he also refers to Rogers’ (1951) emphasis of empathic understanding of another person’s internal frame of reference. “Our most significant awarenesses are developed from our own internal searches and from our attunement and empathic understandings of others” (1990, p. 26).

### - Research Phases

The heuristic inquiry consists of six phases of engagement which Moustakas depicts as follows:

1. **Initial Engagement.** Moustakas asserts that all heuristic inquiries arise from an internal desire to know, “a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one’s own identity and selfhood” (ibid, p. 40). During the initial engagement a significant question awakens within the researcher, and as the researcher reaches inward and becomes more aware the question begins to crystallise and pull into conscious focus. As Polanyi suggests, “To see a problem is to see something hidden that may yet be accessible. [...] It is an engrossing possession of

incipient knowledge which passionately strives to validate itself. Such is the heuristic power of a problem" (1969, pp. 131 - 132).

2. **Immersion.** Once the research question has come into focus and full articulation, the researcher must let the question lead the quest. He must engross himself in the phenomenon under investigation, surrender to it and live it to become intimately acquainted with it. "Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion, for staying with, and for maintaining a sustained focus and concentration. People, places, meetings, readings, nature - all offer possibilities for understanding the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).
3. **Incubation** involves a retreat from the research process, allowing for a "process of spontaneous mental reorganization uncontrolled by conscious effort" (Polanyi, 1964, p. 34). As Moustakas explains, "the period of incubation enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities; for example, the house key that has been misplaced often evades one's recall of its location while one is totally preoccupied with finding it. Almost as soon as one is absorbed with something else, however, the key suddenly appears in consciousness and draws its owner to it" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). Most discoveries, most moments of realisation and insight, scientific or every-day, are not made by conscious and calculated effort but triggered by a retreat from the quest for knowledge and resolution.
4. **Illumination** occurs naturally when the workings of the tacit dimension have reached a maturation point and break through into conscious awareness, revealing to the researcher hitherto hidden qualities and meanings of the phenomenon investigated. The sudden striking realisation - "eureka!" - may be the cause of much delight and affirmation; on the other hand, the researcher may be firmly challenged to modify his own perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon, a sometimes gruelling process requiring a high degree of reflexivity, integrity and honesty.
5. **Explication.** Once illumination has occurred the researcher begins to examine and to articulate what has "awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (ibid, p. 31); and he begins to create a comprehensive depiction of the research topic, taking into account what has been derived from dialogues with others, as well as explicating his own beliefs and judgements. It must be noted that the research process does not usually unfold in an organised, chronological manner. Rather, the researcher may begin to articulate a newly found insight only to return straight to the immersion process for further deepening of his knowledge. Furthermore, explication is likely to unfold in two phases, centring initially around

fragmented individual depictions of the phenomenon based on the researcher's dialogues with his research participants, or co-researchers, and subsequently resulting in a composite depiction in which the researcher attempts to integrate the individual perspectives into a larger whole.

6. **Creative Synthesis.** Every heuristic inquiry culminates in a creative synthesis, an intuitive, aesthetic and passionate rendition of the phenomenon explored, unveiling something of its deeper essence and meaning as perceived through the eyes of the researcher. "In the creative synthesis, there is a free reign of thought and feeling that supports the researcher's knowledge, passion and presence; this infuses the work with a personal, professional, and literary value that can be expressed through a narrative, story, poem, work of art, metaphor, analogy, or tale" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52).

#### **- Data Collection and Analysis**

Heuristic investigations are flexible and open-ended and can include many forms of data - from self-dialogues and personal diaries, to field observations, to the production of creative works. Typically, however, the researcher gathers the core material through a series of interviews with inquiry participants, or co-researchers. In this process, unstructured, conversational interviews are preferred to more standardised and formal approaches. Moustakas (1990) suggests that interviews are not ruled by the clock: "In genuine dialogue, one is encouraged to permit ideas, thoughts feelings, and images to unfold and be expressed naturally" (p. 46). Self-disclosure is permitted as a means of eliciting disclosure from the participants, i.e. the researcher is encouraged to share his own thoughts, impressions and experiences of the phenomenon with the co-researches as a means to facilitate the interviewing process. The quality of the data gathered depends on the researcher's ability to engage empathically with his co-researchers. The researcher has to be "skillful in creating a climate that encourages the co-researcher to respond comfortably, accurately, comprehensively, and honestly in elucidating the phenomenon" (ibid, p. 48). Moustakas also asserts that in theory it is possible to conduct heuristic research with only one participant. However, "a study will achieve richer, deeper, more profound, and more varied meanings when it includes depictions of the experience of [...] 10 - 15 co-researchers" (ibid, p. 47).

The process of qualitative data analysis within a heuristic inquiry interweaves intuitively and fluidly with the inquiry's various research phases. Assume that a researcher has interviewed four participants and that he has transcribed these interviews. Apart from the interview transcripts he might have access to other forms of data, such as co-researcher diaries and artwork. The researcher now works with the data as follows:

**Individual Depictions.** The researcher organises the data so that it accurately and vividly reflects the phenomenon as experienced and understood by each of the four participants. Visualise this as the assembly of four puzzles (consisting of interview data, diaries and artwork), all of which, once assembled, portray the research topic from a particular perspective.

The researcher works with the individual pieces of a co-researcher puzzle by entering repeatedly into periods of immersion and incubation, coding the data informally and intuitively. He is likely to collect further data to refine each individual puzzle whilst he assembles it. He does this with each of the four puzzles until he can fuse them into four unique wholes, i.e. four individual depictions of the phenomenon as perceived and understood by the four participants. These individual depictions retain the language of the participants and offer verbatim examples.

**Data Check & Participant Feedback.** The researcher then returns to the original data to check the accuracy of the individual depictions. He also seeks co-researcher feedback on each individual depiction, checking for comprehensiveness and accuracy and amending the depictions as necessary.

**Composite Depiction.** The researcher now has four individual depictions which in turn make a larger puzzle. It is his task to assemble these four individual depictions into a more encompassing whole: the composite depiction. This assembly is achieved through periods of intense immersion and incubation. A composite depiction can include “exemplary narratives, descriptive accounts, conversations, illustrations” (ibid, p. 52) and it expresses “all of the core meanings of the phenomenon as experienced by the individual participants and by the group as a whole” (ibid).

**Exemplary Portraits.** Once the composite depiction has been created, the researcher once more returns to the raw data to check the depiction for accuracy and comprehensiveness. Moustakas also suggests that the researcher then selects a few participants who exemplify the group as a whole. When engaging in a heuristic inquiry one often finds that some participants reflect unique aspects of the phenomenon under investigation, whilst others have a very comprehensive understanding. Moustakas asserts that the researcher should spend time on the latter participants and expand their individual depictions into what he calls exemplary portraits, i.e. more extensive narratives which reflect both the person and the phenomenon “in a vital and unified manner” (ibid).

**Creative Synthesis.** Every heuristic inquiry culminates in a creative synthesis. If we liken the composite depiction to an assembly of the four participant puzzles into a larger puzzle, then we can interpret the creative synthesis as a fusion of the larger puzzle into an encompassing whole. Essentially all puzzles and puzzle pieces cease to exist as they merge into a higher unified structure. There are no more fragments. Whatever the researcher expresses within the creative synthesis ... is whole, encompassing, comprehensive, vivid and highly significant to participants and the researcher. As Moustakas affirms, “the creative synthesis is the peak moment when the researcher recognises the universal nature of what something is and means, and at the same time grows in self-understanding and as a self” (ibid, p. 90).

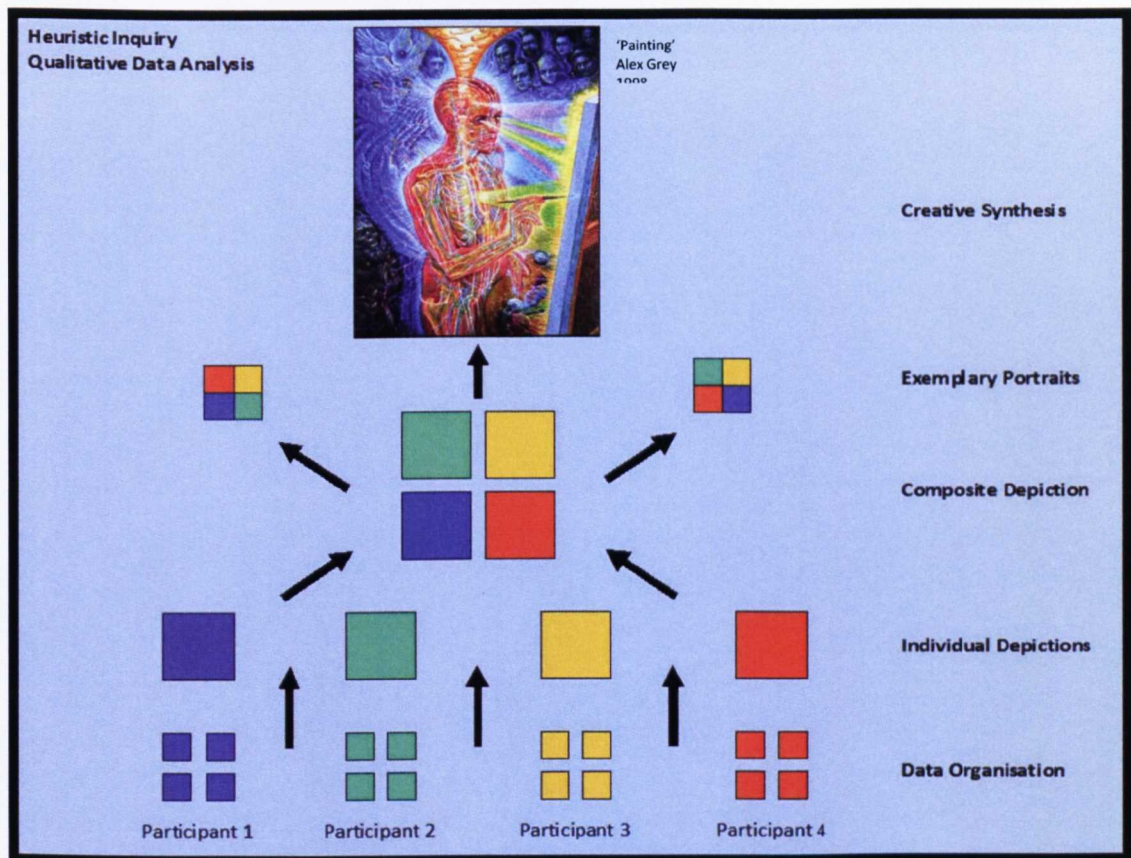


Figure 2.1: Qualitative Data Analysis in heuristics.

### - Validation of Heuristic Research

The question of validity in heuristic research is one of meaning and value. “Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?” asks Moustakas (ibid, p. 32) and refers to Polanyi (1969) who asserts that

“...there are no rules to guide verification that can be relied on in the last resort; the scientist must make the ultimate judgement. The synthesis of essences and meanings inherent in any human experience is a reflection and outcome of the researcher’s pursuit of knowledge. What is presented as truth and what is removed as implausible or idiosyncratic ultimately can be accredited only on the grounds of personal knowledge and judgement” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 33).

In line with Polanyi, Bridgman (1950) emphasised the subjective bases of all scientific validation processes and their dependence on the researcher’s judgement:

“The process that I want to call scientific is a process that involves the continual apprehension of meaning, the constant appraisal of significance [...], and of judging correctness or incorrectness. This checking and judging [...] are done by me and can be done for me by no one else. They are as private as my toothache, and without them science is dead” (p. 50).

Hammersley (2008) also supports this view, asserting that reliance on the researcher’s judgement is inevitable both in quantitative and qualitative research. Researchers cannot assess the quality of their work, by simply applying a set of concrete rules of assessment.

“The task of assessing quality in the context of any relatively complex activity cannot be sensibly reduced to the application of explicit, concrete and exhaustive indicators. Instead, formulations of criteria, in terms of relevant standards and considerations that might need to be taken into account, *come out of* the process of judgement and are modified by it; to one degree or another. At the same time, they also feed back into it: they are used subsequently by researchers in judging quality in other situations; though they always have to be interpreted and may be *re-interpreted* in this process. Furthermore, they will be employed selectively, depending upon the nature of the knowledge claims and research involved” (p. 160).

Whilst there may not be a finite set of assessment criteria which can substitute for judgement, guiding principles can be formulated in each research approach which may allow for assessment of the work in its specific context.

**Heuristic Validation Guidelines:** Due to its internal frame of reference, the heuristic inquiry is a highly subjective research method. It is the responsibility of the researcher to introduce rigour to the inquiry, and heuristic researchers must accordingly be mature and self-aware individuals who are mindful of their co-researchers - or else their inquiry may become too self-referential, even self-indulgent and narcissistic. To honour and do justice to the experiences of the co-researchers the researcher must approach data collection with utmost presence, openness and congruence. He must extend his awareness to include 'the other'

through attunement and empathic understanding. Accuracy of the individual and composite depictions is then enhanced through co-researcher feedback. The researcher must appraise the data and return it to the participants for verification, to ensure comprehensiveness and truthfulness. Moustakas proposes that the validity of a heuristic inquiry can be further enhanced by public assessment: His publication of *Loneliness* (1961) was a way of taking responsibility for the depictions of lonely experience; and following a second publication (*Loneliness and Love*, 1972) in which Moustakas expanded on the meaning of existential loneliness and lonely solitude, he received nearly two thousand responses from his readers, offering verification of the themes and meanings of loneliness depicted in his research which he honoured in *The Touch of Loneliness* (1975).

I would propose that a heuristic inquiry ought also hold up to (academic) peer assessment: If the essence of a human issue or concern is captured vividly and accurately it ought to be of direct relevance and value to the study's target context and audience, as well as create *sympathetic resonance* (Braud & Anderson, 1998, pp. 224 - 226) within the general reader, on the condition that the phenomenon explored relates at least partially to his/her sphere of life experience. It must be recognised, however, that such a way of measuring validity is not without its pitfalls, for what if the reader or reviewer is lacking in receptivity and openness to the research method and outcomes? Or what if, conversely, the reader is too sensitised? - A problem faced by many qualitative research approaches: Their reviewers must display a certain level of skill and insight, as well as balance openness with sufficient detachment - or else they will not be able to adequately evaluate the research processes and results. Examining the concept of sympathetic resonance as a measure of validity in qualitative research, Braud & Anderson suggest that patterns of resonance and types of responses ought to be discerned amongst readers of different backgrounds, for "(a) The patterns teach more about the nature of what is being studied; (b) the patterns inform how the studied experiences interact with various personality, social, and cultural factors; and (c) the patterns provide indicators of replicability, reliability, and generality of findings" (p. 226). However, such meta-evaluation extends well beyond scope of this research project and cannot be of concern.

Lastly, the impact of the heuristic research process on the researcher ought to function as an internal validity assessment point. As Moustakas asserts, in the process of heuristic research "I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery" (1990, p. 13). It is such emphasis on self-growth which firmly situates the heuristic inquiry amongst transpersonal research methods. As Ferrer (2000) stresses, "the participatory turn situates transpersonal studies in greater alignment with the spiritual enterprise because the aim of most contemplative traditions is not 'to have experiences', but

rather to realize and participate in special states of discernment. These states of discernment are special in that they have a soteriological nature: Spiritual knowledge is knowledge that liberates" (p. 232). Of course, it is only the researcher himself who can judge if his research journey was also a journey of personal transformation.

### **- Misconceptions & Criticisms**

Along with other transpersonal research methods, the heuristic inquiry is still viewed critically by those following more conventional research approaches. Two criticisms are most regularly asserted:

**In heuristic research everything goes...** The heuristic inquiry is often accused of being an 'everything goes' approach which has no method at all. Heuristics is by its very nature a method in the making. The method emerges as a research project progresses. Nonetheless, as described above, there are underlying principles which guide the heuristic research process and impose on it rules, structures and limitations.

**Heuristic research is solipsistic and self-referential...** The danger of solipsism in heuristic research exists and can only be prevented by a sufficiently aware and mature researcher who fairly balances self-search with empathic inquiry into the perspectives of co-researchers. Braud (2004) suggests that the same danger exists in other transpersonal research methods, e.g. Organic Inquiry. In direct contrast to this criticism, Sela-Smith (2002) suggests that when Moustakas' heuristic research process is applied it often revolves too much around the inclusion of research participants who can distract the researcher from the main objective of the approach, i.e. the journey of self-search and self-discovery. In a review of heuristic research documents, Sela-Smith found that of 28 reports only three fulfilled the original aim of the method.

"The majority did not report personal, subjective experience. Instead of having the process determine the phases, nearly all seemed to have been conducted by a time clock, a calendar, and by procedural rules. In each of the 25 cases, there was no reported internal discovery of the tacit dimension, and themes for the explication of experience were sought from coparticipants instead of from within the self. In those 25 cases, none presented evidence of transformation based on an *I-who-feels* finding access to tacit knowledge and bringing change to it in the process. What I consider to be key to the investigation is missing" (pp. 70 - 71).

Sela-Smith elucidates that such broad failure to apply the method correctly can be related to subtle ambivalences in Moustakas' (1990) depiction of the research process, promoting a



double-focus and shift from the 'I who experiences' to the 'I who observes and explicates the experience of self and others'.

“Though self-search, in my opinion, is the objective of this method, even in Moustakas' (1990) self-report of his process, there was a shift in his focus from the *self* who is experiencing the problem to the *experience* that the self is having with the problem. In this shift, though it might appear that he or she is attempting to understand an experience being felt, in reality, the experience becomes the focus and there is no return to the *I-who-feels*. Feeling is disconnected from the research and self-transformation does not occur. The tacit dimension is not entered, and the internal structures remain intact” (2002, p. 71).

Sela-Smith proposes that this double-focus creates a central incongruence within the method, initially encouraging the researcher to surrender to an internal question and to leap into the unknown so that he may be carried towards “a new stream of consciousness” (Roads in Moustakas, 1990, p. 13), but then impeding the researcher by imposing a codified research structure

“that requires making lists, constructing methods, and following data-collection procedures in a prescribed fashion. The final product is a document that depicts themes, meanings, and essences of the experience. Other participants become the major source of data. Validity of the self-experience is established by similar experiences of others; yet validity in subjective discovery-research is not possible by comparing to others' experience” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 76).

Whilst Sela-Smith fears for the loss of inward discernment in favour of an external, prescribed and procedural focus on the other, I believe that this incongruence - or rather paradox - within the method makes for an excellent challenge for any heuristic researcher. I believe that in a well conducted heuristic inquiry the researcher will manage to resolve the double-pull of outer procedures and inner free flow, and transcend the paradox of 'other versus self'. As Krishnamurti asserts,

“I can observe myself only in relationship because all life is relationship. It is no use sitting in a corner meditating about myself. I cannot exist by myself. I can exist only in relationship to people, things and ideas, and in studying my relationship to outward things and people, as well as to inward things, I begin to understand myself” (1969, p. 22).

In conclusion, I suggest that - and here only a shift to first person narrative as heuristic researcher will suffice - in my being with the other, in my deep immersion in the other and experience of the other, in my practice of research as meditation, requiring total self-abandonment in union with the other ... I may begin to see what I have been exploring ... for

the first time ... clearly and simply and wholly ... and I may begin to grasp myself. Such is the potential of heuristic research.

### **Re-discovering the Research Question**

As I set out on my PhD research project I was not completely aware of the personal significance of my research project and question. This is not unusual for heuristic research. As Moustakas (1990) asserts, "I begin the heuristic journey with something that has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown. In such an odyssey, I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the mystery summons me and lures me 'to let go of the known and to swim in an unknown current'" (p. 13). It wasn't until I began to become deeply immersed in my co-researchers' performance practices in 2006 and 2007 that I realised that my PhD project was really a personal search for a spiritual practice which could sustain and nurture my own personal growth. I was seeking a practice, looking for a way of working and being which would foster my development as an artist and as a person. Three years into my PhD journey I refined my central focus and research question to reflect the personal nature of my quest:

**"What is my experience of transformation, as initiated by self-expressive performance?"**

### **Research Design**

#### **Initial Engagement: Into the Maze**

Moustakas (1990) affirms that heuristic research is open-ended. "There is no exclusive list [of methods or research tools, JB] that would be appropriate for every heuristic investigation, but rather each research process unfolds in its own way" (p. 43). Whilst I conducted my Masters research in a very structured and pre-planned manner I allowed much of my PhD journey to unfold of its own accord, by permitting my intuition to run freely and by surrendering to the currents of synchronicity which slowly but surely carried me towards my eclectic range of co-researchers. This process was by far more time-consuming, challenging, frustrating and work intensive than it may sound. In the first one and a half years of my research many doors which I was keen to open remained closed. I felt I had entered a research maze and was running into dead end after dead end. Some of the theatre practitioners I wanted to interview failed to reply to my emails and letters. Progress felt excruciatingly slow. Over time I contacted 30 individual theatre practitioners, academics and theatre companies, of which only a handful

were interested in partaking in my research project. It took me some time to realise that I needed to trust the process and have faith that whichever doors would open would be the right ones.

From the beginning I was drawn to explore the links between self-expressive theatre practices and spiritual practices. To me, theatre as a path toward transformation revolved around the notion of (trans)personal development. Whilst I recognised that transformational work could unfold in therapeutic drama settings my main interest was not to explore theatre as therapy but to investigate how theatre could serve as a spiritual discipline. I shall expand on this crucial differentiation within the literature review - suffice to say here that I perceived the primary difference between 'theatre as therapy' and 'theatre as spiritual practice' to be one of scope: Whilst one could define the aim of theatre as therapy as 'an individual achieving functional normality' in psychological and somatic terms, the aim of theatre as spiritual practice could be defined as centring around a person's path towards 'self-actualisation' or 'enlightenment', i.e. the awakening to and attainment of levels of being which reach beyond the 'functional normality' baseline. Secondly, the difference between the two domains may be defined as one of purpose. Whilst theatre as therapy may revolve around the increase of psychological insight, promoting personal healing and integration, theatre as spiritual practice may focus on areas other than the development of 'I', such as the surrender of self in the exploration of higher states of consciousness and the adherence to a discipline in service of Sources beyond the self.

At the beginning of my journey I had fragmented knowledge of theatre practitioners who had approached their practice as a spiritual discipline. I had read that Antonin Artaud's (e.g. 1999) *Theatre of Cruelty* which aimed to induce emotional catharsis through intense confrontation with secret obsessions and desires owed much to the teachings of Taoism (Innes, 1993). I also knew that early on in his career the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski had been concerned with "a spectator as a spiritual seeker, who wished to improve by self-analysis through 'confrontation with the performance'" (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 1996, p. 46), and that Grotowski's theatrical techniques owed much to his study of religious rituals and practices from around the world and from India in particular (e.g. Schechner & Wolford, 1997). Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005) had opened my eyes to the *Natyashastra*, the main treatise in Indian philosophy which deals with theatre aesthetics and which claims that theatre may serve as a tool for "the development of *moksha*, enlightenment, higher states of consciousness" (p. 1). I was furthermore aware of a connection between theatre and ritual which had been thoroughly explored by seminal theatre directors, such as Richard Schechner and Peter Brook, the latter of whom had introduced me to the concept of the *holy theatre*, "The Theatre of the Invisible-Made Visible" (1968, p. 47) - a theatre which could capture "the invisible currents that rules our lives" (p. 50). Likening the holy theatre to the practice of Zen, Brook asserts that holy

theatre not only presented a glimpse of the invisible but that it offered conditions which enabled its perception (p. 63). Finally, I knew that therapeutic theatre practices, such as Psychodrama (e.g. Røine, 1997) and Dramatherapy (e.g. Jennings et al, 1994) were relevant to my research interests.

I was most intrigued and inspired by Jerzy Grotowski's writings and thus decided to set out and find practitioners who followed in the Polish director's footsteps. As will become clear from the depiction of my research results, it was most difficult to penetrate into the inner circle of Grotowski's descendents, some of whom were incredibly protective of their former teacher and his transmissions. Indeed, their relationship to Grotowski could be described as that of disciples to their master; and some of the disciples' work seemed as guarded and impenetrable as the teachings of esoteric schools like the Gurdjieff Institute.

### **Immersion: From Maze to Labyrinth**

From the autumn of 2005 a bread-crumbed trail of co-researchers began to emerge. I followed this trail, not knowing whom I would meet on my journey, who would take me closer to the core of my quest. In the Heuristic Inquiry there is no such thing as a sampling strategy. One does not arrive at a list of co-researchers by means of convenience, judgement or theoretical sampling (e.g. Marshall, 1996). Instead I set my intention to investigate Theatre as a Transformative Practice and I followed all leads which began to emerge, trusting that I would be drawn towards the right research participants over time. It was my firm belief that my inner world and intention would act as a *chaotic attractor* (Abraham, 1989; Krippner, 1994; Krippner & Ryan, 1998) drawing towards me the appropriate outer circumstances in which my research could unfold.

Following initial contact with each of my co-researchers, during which I informed them of the purpose and nature of my PhD research, I entered into an immersive relationship with each individual and company, collecting data with the help of a variety of tools which would enable me to comprehensively explore the experience of self-expressive performance.

### **Interviews**

Between November 2005 and January 2009 I conducted a total of 23 interviews, all of which contributed to the emerging Gestalt of research results. Patton (1980, pp. 197 - 198) suggests that there are three approaches to interviewing, which are appropriate to the heuristic inquiry:

- 1) The informal conversational interview: *spontaneous questions*

- 2) The general interview guide: *themed questions*
- 3) The standardised open-ended interview: *set catalogue of questions*

My own approach was driven by a general interview guide which I had designed at the outset of my research and which I revised and adapted throughout the inquiry (see **Appendix C**). The interview guide revolved around questions inviting my co-researchers to reflect upon their own performance practice as a path towards personal transformation. I asked my co-researchers to describe key components of their practices, and I prompted them to reflect upon 'experiences of transformation', as well as reflecting upon perceptions of 'body' and 'self' in the process of rehearsal and performance.

The interview guide functioned as a springboard for open-ended, conversational interviews in which the co-researchers and I spontaneously ventured further afield, exploring individual histories, philosophies and the roots of the co-researchers' work approaches.

### **Co-Researcher Literature**

The data which I collected through interviews was further enriched by literature authored by my co-researchers, as well as literature by other individuals who had in recent years explored my co-researchers' practices. In the depictions of the research results I drew from co-researcher websites, books, papers, articles and other authoritative publications, all of which I treated as primary data. Where relevant I have given a breakdown of the sources in the depiction of the research results.

### **Workshop Experiences & Diaries**

From the beginning of my research journey I knew that interviews and literature alone would not allow for sufficient penetration into the research topic. Substantial knowledge of any performance practice can only be acquired through *doing*. From March 2006 I participated in a range of workshops, work sessions and laboratories facilitated by my co-researchers. These enabled me to dwell within each work approach, becoming one with it, and coming to know some of its deeper nuances and meanings. Such indwelling involved data collection not primarily driven by an analytic and linguistic intellect but by bodily, pre-rational modes of knowing - through sensory absorption, felt sense and creative play with proprioceptive awareness and imagery.

I subsequently tried to translate my workshop experiences into diaries, mapping both content and structure, as well as describing my personal journey through the workshop. During the write-ups I was aware that each practice would reveal itself in its own unique, and typically non-verbal ways and that in translation I must find the right language to capture its essence -

a language rich in imagery and metaphors which would reflect the intentions of my co-researchers, as well as give voice to my own experience and emerging insights and concerns.

I am under no illusion that, even now, after my numerous immersive encounters with my co-researchers, I have complete insight into their philosophies and practices. Nonetheless, I feel that my knowledge and insight have reached the satisfactory point of maturation and saturation necessary for a substantive PhD thesis.

### **Synchronistic encounters**

Throughout my research I encountered the work of theatre practitioners whose approaches were relevant to my research but who never became official co-researchers.

In 2007 I participated in a five-day training in the Indian martial art Kalarippayattu at the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw, as well as in two week-long workshops with former members of Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory, Rena Mirecka and Zygmunt Molik at the University of Kent in Canterbury. Whilst these workshops certainly enriched my experience and knowledge of practices surrounding the work of Grotowski I have chosen not to feature them directly in this thesis. In 2008 I further participated in a three-day workshop with the Indian company Milón Méla whose director Abani Biswas was one of Grotowski's collaborators in the 'Theatre of Sources' period. I have chosen to include some personal reflections on this workshop in the relevant section of the literature review.

### **Personal Creative Practice**

This list of data collection tools would be incomplete without a mention of my own continuing creative practice which has essentially enabled me to integrate the encounters with my co-researchers into my own life and work. Since September 2006 I have facilitated a diverse range of taster workshops, workshop series and laboratories in both professional performance contexts and community contexts, in which I have revisited aspects of my co-researchers' practices, allowing me to extend my comprehension of the transformative effects of performance, and enabling me to discover my own unique practice and path. The facilitation of these workshops crucially necessitated my shifting from the role of participant to the role of workshop leader and guide, forcing me to take full responsibility for each activity and thus enabling me to gain a greater insight into the impact of the work. I have come to know that it is by leading an activity that one has the opportunity to grasp it more fully, for as leader one is challenged to be more attentive to the processes unfolding in each person and in the group as a whole. Thus, the experiences I have made in my own practice have deeply informed the featured research results.

In the following table I give an overview of the data collected. The table does not track the unfolding relationship with my co-researchers in chronological manner but rather focuses on the extent to which I engaged with each individual and/ or company. Each co-researcher is introduced in depth in the individual depictions featured in chapter 4.

**Table 2.1: Co-researcher Overview**

<p><b>Dzieci</b> New York City</p>	<p>An international experimental theatre ensemble dedicated to a search for the "sacred" through the medium of theatre. See: <a href="http://dziecitheatre.org">http://dziecitheatre.org</a></p>
	<p><b>Matt Mitler</b> Company director</p> <p>Interview, conducted in person.</p> <p>Observation of <b>Fools Mass</b>, the ritual performance of a Catholic Mass. Performed by the Dzieci ensemble.</p> <p>Participation in <b>Maraton</b>, a 24-hour Para-Theatrical Workshop. Led by company director Matt Mitler and the Dzieci ensemble.</p>
	<p><b>Matt Mitler</b> Company director</p> <p>Follow-up interview, conducted in person.</p>
	<p><b>Rebecca Sokoll</b> Assistant director</p> <p>Interview, conducted in person.</p>
	<p><b>Yvonne Brechbühler</b> Founding company member</p> <p>Interview, conducted in person.</p>
	<p><b>Jesse Hathaway</b> Company member</p> <p>Interview, conducted in person.</p>
	<p><b>Bob Strock</b> Music director</p> <p>Interview, conducted in person.</p>
	<p><b>Stephen Shelley</b> Former company member</p> <p>Interview, conducted in person.</p>

**The TAI Group**  
New York City

International teaching and consulting firm which has its roots in the performing arts and now works in the arena of creativity and leadership.  
See: <http://www.thetaigroup.com>

**Graeme Thomson**  
Director of Strategy and  
Business Development

Interview, conducted in person.

Follow-up interview, conducted by telephone.

Participation in **Communicating with Power and Presence**, a two-day foundation programme, exploring authentic communication and leadership. Led by TAI director **Gifford Booth** and independent management consultant **Kathy Cramer**.

**Gifford Booth**  
Director and Co-Founder

Follow-up interview with Gifford and Kathy, conducted by telephone.

**Kathy Cramer, Ph.D.**  
Founder of the Cramer  
Institute  
St. Louis, Missouri

Additional follow-up interview with Gifford, conducted in person.

**Allen Schoer**  
CEO and Co-Founder

Interview, conducted in person.

Participation in **The Creative Dynamic**, a two-day foundation programme, exploring the fundamental principles of creativity. Led by Director of Programs **Elise DeRosa** and Senior Coach **Sam Carter**.

**Elise DeRosa**  
Director of Programs

Follow-up interview, conducted in person.

**Twila Thompson**  
Director and Co-Founder

Interview, conducted in person.



**ParaTheatrical  
ReSearch**

Berkley,  
California

Not a “tribal identity or a card-carrying business or an established theatre company” ... but a “rotating skeleton crew of ritualists, actors, performers, vocalists, and dancers who come and go depending on the demands and talents required for each ritual lab or project” (Antero Alli, web), facilitated by Antero Alli. See: <http://www.paratheatrical.com>

Participation in **The Alchemy Laboratory**, a three-month paratheatre lab, exploring the fundamental techniques and sources of paratheatre as inspired by Jerzy Grotowski.

**Antero Alli** Interview, conducted in person.  
Founder & Director

**Nick Walker** Interview, conducted in person.  
Long-standing member

**JoJo Razor** Interview, conducted in person.  
Former member

**John Chung** Interview, conducted in person.  
Newcomer

**Odin Teatret**  
Holstebro,  
Denmark

An international theatre laboratory under the lead of Italian director Eugenio Barba. Odin Teatret’s extensive work includes its own productions, theatre workshops and festivals, publishing and teaching activities. See: <http://www.odinteatret.dk>

**Eugenio Barba** Interview, conducted in person.  
Company director

**Julia Varley** Interview, conducted in person.  
Actress

**Roberta Carreri** Interview, conducted in person.  
Actress

**Ang Gey Pin**  
Florence, Italy

Independent performance artist from Singapore. Member of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Pontedera, Italy, between 1998 and 2006. Now performs and teaches internationally. Her practice is informed by her rigorous study of her Chinese heritage and her deep immersion in Tai Chi Chuan.

I participated in a 10-day residential workshop led by Gey Pin in Vallenera, Italy.

Interview, conducted in person during the workshop.

**Arlene Audergon**  
London

Arlene Audergon (PH.D.) is a therapist trained in Process Oriented Psychology. She is co-founder and central trainer of the Research Society for Process Oriented Psychology in the UK. Arlene combines her background in psychotherapy with a strong interest in the performing arts and she has worked with many performers, musicians, improvisers, directors and writers in the USA and the UK. See: <http://www.processwork-audergon.com>

Interview, conducted in person.

**Workcenter**  
Pontedera,  
Italy

The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski & Thomas Richards pursues performance practice and research in line with Grotowski's last work phase: Art as Vehicle.  
See: <http://www.theworkcenter.org>

I have chosen to present Gey Pin's data in cluster with a diary from a 5-day audition workshop at the Workcenter which I attended and which affected me profoundly. However, the Workcenter is not an official co-researcher in my PhD project.

### **Incubation & Illumination**

Data collection and analysis for this PhD research project have taken six years on a part-time schedule. Alongside my PhD I have maintained a freelance career as a performing artist, project manager and university lecturer. Whilst my freelance work has at times felt like an unhelpful distraction from my PhD research, it has been a fundamental part of a deeper integration process, allowing me to forge my own creative practice in response to the encounters with my PhD co-researchers. By synchronicity, since the start of my PhD project in 2004 I have become progressively drawn into commissions in the arena of arts & health, developing, managing and facilitating specialist workshops and programmes which aim to foster mental health, wellbeing and personal development. In the autumn of 2006 I was commissioned by the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton to set up Creative Alternatives, an *Arts on Prescription* programme which offers creative interventions to adults experiencing depression and anxiety. Creative Alternatives is available via self-referral and referral from local health providers and it aims to offer an alternative 'treatment' to medication, such as antidepressants, tranquilisers and mood stabilisers. My work within Creative Alternatives has offered a retreat from the PhD research process whilst allowing for deepening illumination of self-expressive performance work and its transformative impacts.

### **Explication: Individual Depictions, Composite Depiction & Creative Synthesis**

Intense periods of immersion and incubation have enabled me to develop an extensive explication of performance as a transformative practice, resulting in the creation of individual depictions which are arranged in clusters. In the creation of cluster depictions I have deviated from Moustakas' approach who proposed that one depiction per individual ought to be created in the first instance. However, whilst my approach was certainly person-centred it transpired from my interviews that my co-researchers were largely subscribing to the philosophy and approach of their respective companies - which I could best represent in the form of cluster depictions.

The extent and depth of the material presented varies from depiction to depiction, for I spent substantial amounts of time with some of my co-researchers, whilst meeting others only briefly. The process of qualitative data analysis in heuristics is immersive and person-centred, honouring biographical material as much as topic-centred material. Thus the full six depictions to which this study gave rise include extensive background material which may be regarded as more peripheral to the phenomenon under investigation. In order to maintain the reader's focus, therefore, I have chosen to present five of the six cluster depictions in abbreviated form. These abbreviated depictions comprise Chapter 4. The processes though which I generated the Composite Depiction (presented in Chapter 5) and the Creative Synthesis (Chapter 6), however, depended on my full engagement with the unexpurgated cluster

depictions (which are featured in **Appendices K.1 - K.5**). Accordingly, cross-references to material supporting aspects of the composite frequently relate to these appendices.

I further deviated from Moustakas' approach, in that I chose not to create Exemplary Portraits. As time unfolded my cluster depictions became increasingly complex and extensive, giving me sufficiently comprehensive insight into the processes and dynamics under investigation. As such, I felt that the Exemplary Portraits would only have led to duplication of material already presented.

The cluster depictions presented in Chapter 4 gave rise to the Composite Depiction and Creative Synthesis by means of extensive immersion. I revisited the cluster depictions, intuitively extracting an array of themes and subthemes and arranging them in a large visual map, using *Mind Manager* from Mindjet ([www.mindjet.com](http://www.mindjet.com)). The programme enabled me to handle the large amount of text-based data and re-organise and refine the material into the map of Theatre as a Transformative Practice featured in Chapter 5. The process of coding, by which I arrived at the map, was informal, intuitive and creative. I repeatedly read material, visually arranged it on screen and worked with it creatively, through expressive movement, writing and digital image collage. It was by such means that I eventually arrived at the Creative Synthesis.

I was drawn to develop the Creative Synthesis using a digital presentation tool called *Prezi* ([www.prezi.com](http://www.prezi.com)). Prezi utilises a single canvas, upon which layers of information and meaning can be built, giving the viewer the opportunity to zoom in and out of any element of a presentation, and to view the whole at the click of a button. The programme enabled me to tell the story of Theatre as a Transformative Practice, without losing sight of the complexity of the themes portrayed in the Composite Depiction. More importantly, the programme enabled me to work in a visual manner, allowing me to integrate imagery which I found to be highly pertinent to the ideas I unearthed in my research.

## **Ethics**

Prior to data collection I informed my co-researchers in detail of the aims of my PhD research, describing the nature, purpose and structure of my inquiry. I also assured the co-researchers that any information which could identify them would be kept confidential. However, as my inquiry progressed it became clear that my co-researchers did not want to remain anonymous; instead they all requested to be fully acknowledged for their work and contributions to the research project. I thus adapted the *Participation Release Agreement* (see **Appendix B** for final version used) to include an acknowledgement of ownership of my co-

researchers' work approaches. The Release Agreement also asked for authorisation of the recording and transcription of interview and workshop diary data for the purpose of the inquiry and for subsequent publication, whilst assuring that the original audio recordings would not be broadcast.

### **Data Validation**

Throughout data analysis and write-up I have made every effort to ensure that all interview transcripts and cluster depictions have been validated by my co-researchers. Once prepared, I sent the transcripts and later the depictions to the co-researchers by email. Some co-researchers responded, giving detailed feedback which I subsequently integrated into the depictions, whilst others only briefly commented, confirming the validity of the relevant document. I have collated all feedback received in **Appendix M**. Unfortunately, to date I have received no feedback from Roberta Carreri of Odin Teatret.

The depiction of my experiences at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards forms an exception regarding validation. The Workcenter never became an official co-researcher in my PhD project. As such, any data presented concerning the Workcenter are valid only in so far as they reflect my personal experiences at the centre and they should not be viewed as an objectively accurate depiction of the Workcenter's philosophy and approach.

# Chapter Three:

## Literature Review

In a heuristic inquiry the review of literature is an ongoing endeavour which underpins and informs the unfolding inquiry. From the beginning of my PhD journey I knew that many areas of research and writing would be relevant to my interdisciplinary quest - from performance studies, to humanistic and transpersonal psychology, to arts therapies and 'arts on prescription' programmes with which I have been intimately involved as an artist and manager, to anthropology and ritual studies, to the wisdom traditions which continue to inspire and influence my co-researchers. In the following I shall touch upon key readings from areas which have fundamentally informed this PhD research project. In doing so, I will make no attempt to provide a complete and comprehensive overview of the various disciplines I shall touch upon. The topics covered are vast and complex and it is easy to lose the thread. Indeed, as you read the review you may ask: What is the thread? - The thread is always 'the question'. The essence of heuristics is to be in the unknown. As Moustakas demands it, one must live the question which drives the research - and this applies to the literature review as it does to the remainder of the inquiry. As such, the literature review is a part of the search, it is not a part of the answer.

I have chosen to offer a write-up which mirrors the unpredictable, indeed labyrinthine quality of my research. I invite you to flow with me from topic to topic, knowing only that we are moving in a circular fashion, as one does in a classical labyrinth, revisiting themes from differing perspectives, correlating them, slowly but surely, knowing that path of a classical labyrinth is precisely designed to cause con-fusion whilst taking the walker ever closer to its centre.

## Art as a Tool for Health Improvement

“Creativity should be explored as representing the highest degree of emotional health, as the expression of normal people in the act of actualizing themselves.”

(Rollo May, in Halprin, 2003, p. 83)

The disciplines of arts and health have long been combined in a variety of contexts: In the service of health care promotion artists have been instrumental in delivering health messages to the public through awareness campaigns, issue-based workshop programmes and health care marketing (e.g. see Lime, 2010; Arts for Health, 2011). Artists have also been working in health care environments to improve surroundings and services for patients and staff. Furthermore, the humanities (e.g. literature, arts, philosophy) have been used to encourage medical practitioners to be more reflective in their work and to increase their understanding of the experience of ill health and suffering. In recent decades there has been a shift towards providing health care within community settings, particularly for the treatment of mental ill health. As part of this shift there has been an emergence of out-patient and community based arts services with a health focus, such as ‘arts on prescription’ programmes which endeavour to offer creative interventions as an alternative to standard medical treatments for widespread mental health conditions. As previously mentioned, in September 2006 I was commissioned by Sefton MBC and NHS Sefton to develop and implement the artistic output of such a programme, Creative Alternatives ([www.creativealternatives.org.uk](http://www.creativealternatives.org.uk)), which offers creative workshops in a number of art media to adults experiencing depression and/or anxiety. There is now a substantial body of evidence for the positive impact of such arts based provision in mental health, highlighting the effectiveness of creative activities in improving participants’ self-confidence, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing, as well as showing how creative practice can facilitate empowering transformations in health behaviours and lifestyle choices, including smoking cessation, reduction in alcohol consumption and improved diet (e.g. Snow et al, 2003; Seckler, 2007; Bockler & Lovell, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

At the root of the success of all creative approaches in mental health lies the recognition of the fundamental significance of imagination and play in human development and growth. “It is because the arts are rooted in the existential capacity of the imagination to transcend literal reality that they can serve to present alternative possibilities of being to us” (Levine & Levine,

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<sup>1</sup> More widely, studies of the effectiveness of the creativity in health improvement have shown that the arts have been applied successfully to the management, psychological adjustment and recovery process from the following health conditions: chronic pain (Lamers, 2005), pain caused by rheumatoid arthritis (Schorr, 1993), Dementia (Allan & Killick, 2000), high blood pressure (Konlaan et al, 2000), cardiovascular problems (White, 1999), Parkinson’s disease (Pacchetti et al, 2000) and post traumatic stress disorder (Landy, 2009).

1999, p. 12). Furthermore, as highlighted in the Methodology Chapter, arts practice “affords us insights into life that are not available through strictly cognitive means” (ibid, p. 13), thus allowing for a deepening of self-insight and self-expression.

A major inroad in arts and mental health has been made with the development of a diverse range of art therapies in the United States and Europe, which unfold across the domains of visual art, music, drama and dance/movement. In the UK the first three are now regulated by the Health Professions Council and require professional training and qualification, whilst the statutory regulation of dance/ movement therapy by the HPC is in progress. All of the above art therapies are regarded as distinct professional forms of psychotherapy which utilise their particular creative medium as the primary mode of communication between client and therapist. In each medium a spectrum of practice has emerged which ranges from approaches reliant upon specific psychological frameworks, such as object-relations theory or person-centred theory, on the one hand to non-analytic approaches on the other hand, which stress the creative and expressive potential of the relevant discipline.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, ‘expressive arts therapy’ (as promoted amongst others by Rogers, 1993; and Halprin, 2003) has emerged as a distinct field of practice, favouring an intermodal or interdisciplinary approach, in contradistinction to the specialised forms of arts therapy already available.

“Expressive arts therapy is grounded not in particular techniques or media but in the capacity of the arts to respond to human suffering. [...] It is the same body which moves, listens, sees and speaks. These sensory modalities underlie the formation of artistic disciplines. All the various modes of bodily expression are gathered up in the unity of the perceiving and moving body (Merleau-Ponty, 1966). In the same way, the imagination expresses itself in a multiplicity of forms. Whether through fantasy, dream or art work, the imagination has the capacity to utilise every sensory modality in the creation of new meaning. Imagination is intermodal in its very essence” (Levine & Levine, 1999, p. 11).

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<sup>2</sup> In the realm of dramatherapy Meldrum (1994, p. 18) asserts that the debate between those who want dramatherapy to declare itself as a therapy based on theatre art and those who wish to declare dramatherapy to be a form of psychotherapy is as yet unresolved. Meldrum refers fellow dramatherapist Dorothy Langley who regards dramatherapy as fundamentally different from the verbal psychotherapies because it is not language based and it is able to treat clients who are unable to speak. In an attempt to resolve the issue Meldrum offers the distinction between theatre as a therapeutic experience and theatre as therapy, citing Irwin (1979) who “defines a ‘therapeutic experience’ as ‘any experience which helps an individual to feel a greater sense of competence’” (p. 19) and “‘therapy’ [...] as ‘a specific form of intervention to bring about intra-psychic, interpersonal and behavioural change’” (ibid). Meldrum asserts that dramatherapy clearly operates as therapy “where the dramatherapist uses drama structures with the specific intention of assisting clients to experience the emotions they may have blocked from consciousness, to gain insight into their motivations and to see how their own processes affect their interactions with others and the others’ reactions to them in their lives in the here-and-now” (ibid).



From a historical perspective drama is perhaps the most intermodal of all art forms (notwithstanding the recent emergence of television, film and other forms of electronic art which are thoroughly intermodal). Alongside dance it is also the most primary and perhaps potent form of creative expression, because an actor's body is his/her instrument. Drama is imagination embodied, and through theatre we may learn about ourselves, for we are all actors in our own lives, continuously performing our own story, continuously enacting and embodying our own visions and beliefs. As Jennings asserts, from birth (and even perhaps beforehand in the uterus) we "*construe our lives in dramatic form*" (ibid, p. 29). Our lives are a string of dramatic scenes featuring a multitude of characters and we are the protagonists, shaping the drama as it unfolds. Therapies, such as psychodrama and dramatherapy, may thus help us become more conscious creators of our lives.

## Psychodrama

"Play yourself as you never were, so you can begin to be what you could have been. Be your own inspiration, your own author, your own executor, your own therapist and finally, your own Creator."

(Jacob Levy Moreno, in Røine, 1997, p. 20)

The modern use of drama as therapeutic intervention has some of its roots in psychodrama which first emerged in Europe alongside avant-garde theatre in the early 1920s. Whilst the French surrealist poet and theatre director Antonin Artaud experimented with theatrical techniques to achieve performances which could shatter what he perceived as the existential complacency of bourgeoisie audiences, awakening them to the true reality of their existence (e.g. Knapp, 1980), psychiatrist and psychosociologist Jacob Levy Moreno endeavoured to facilitate the unconditional, truthful meeting of human minds in psychodrama, "without prejudice, diagnosis and subjective interpretation" (Røine, 1997, p. 16). Foreshadowing Carl Rogers' person-centred approach, Moreno held the conviction that human beings have the capacity to take responsibility for their own destiny, to become their own saviour. "Socrates was his ideal as the *redeemer* in the Socratic concept of spiritual birth (*majevtik*) and as the *teacher* who gives human beings knowledge of themselves" (ibid, p. 18). Moreno hoped that psychodrama would "lift the barrier and close the gap between 'I' and 'You'. Indeed, he also wanted to close the gap between 'I' and 'God'" (ibid).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Recent research (Waldl, 2004) has revealed that Moreno's ideas predate the philosophy of Martin Buber, author of 'I and Thou' (1923/1958), by approximately nine years. It now seems most likely that Buber (who was for some time co-editor of *Der Neue Daimon*, a periodical published by Moreno) was strongly influenced by Moreno's concepts of *Begegnung* (German, 'Encounter') when developing his philosophy. Besides

Psychodrama employs guided dramatic action through which individuals explore past and present conflicts, enacting memories, role-playing 'unfinished business', reliving real-life circumstances or giving expression to inner tensions, dreams, concerns. "The main tenet of psychodrama is that each individual has an inborn need to be involved in his own life. Psychodramatic techniques are meant to train spontaneity and fantasy in order to break away from, or accept, the limitations of one's own opportunities in a social environment. The stage is the magical space populated by imaginary beings. It provides the venue for situations that have to be mastered" (ibid, p. 22). Moreno regarded child's play as the starting point for a natural psychodrama, through which children learn to master new life circumstances, as well as manage to defuse and bring under control all that threatens and challenges their inner equilibrium. The father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud who was a contemporary of Moreno, too, regarded play as a path to mastery of all that is dangerous and frightening to the psyche. Freud believed that play could specifically offer an opportunity to enter into the unconscious recesses of the psyche and help a client reveal all that which was hidden, all that which he had suppressed from his conscious mind. Freud used the term 'unheimlich' (German, 'uncanny') as opposite of 'heimlich' (German, 'home-like') to define all psychic material from which a person had become estranged. "That which does not belong is still something familiar' (*Das Unheimliche ist irgend eine Art von heimlich*), since nothing can actually exist in the human psyche that has not ever been there. The dangerous then becomes something that once belonged but was suppressed because of its problematic nature" (ibid, p. 25). Moreno found that in psychodrama incomplete situations and undigested roles within an individual could find their way to the surface and be expressed and released in a safe and controlled manner. Similarly, in psychoanalysis Freud used the process of free verbal association<sup>4</sup> to elicit free flow of thought and to enable the client to bring 'the dangerous' to light.

However, despite strong parallels between psychoanalysis and psychodrama Moreno was resolutely anti-Freudian. Whilst psychoanalysis relied on verbal play and exploration, psychodrama favoured action methods to engage the client. "Drama involves doing. The dramatic world is one of action, where participants enact and are active. [...] There is a profound connection between body, senses, emotional and mental states. By engaging at a

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creating psychodrama, Moreno is regarded as a founding pioneer of sociometry, group psychotherapy and sociodrama.

<sup>4</sup> Freud's ideas found profound resonance in the work of the Surrealists who were intent on liberating the Unconscious through experimentation with free association games and exercises in a multiplicity of media - from collage and photo montage, to automatic writing and drawing. We shall examine the work of the Surrealists in greater depth when we come to explore the approach of the French theatre revolutionary Antonin Artaud who for some time assumed a leading role within the Surrealist movement and whose experimentations with theatrical exercises which were meant to make the unconscious conscious relate directly to this PhD research.

physical level the client has easier access to their emotional and inner world” (Chesner, 1994, p. 115). Whilst a professional actor in training focuses on the expansion of his/her vocal and physical flexibility so that s/he may inhabit dramatic roles more effectively, for the client in therapy physical engagement means “both a fuller expression of the habitual self, and also the chance to adopt new and alternative roles in action” (ibid).

In psychodrama, role play and role reversal are central features of the dramatic enactment. The protagonist role plays and role reverses with other members of the group who stand in as ‘auxiliary egos’ and whose function it is to portray the other persons who were a part of the original drama, i.e. the conflict, memory, dream or circumstance that has become the theme of the session. The portrayal may be of ordinary individuals, or of supernatural, mythical beings, even of abstract concepts.<sup>5</sup>

At its core, each psychodramatic enactment is driven by transferences on the part of the protagonist. The term transference stems from psychoanalysis and describes a client’s displacement of positive or negative feelings onto the therapist. In psychodrama, transferences of the protagonist are not interpreted as they would be in psychoanalysis; rather they are allowed to play themselves out without interruption. “In Moreno’s terminology, positive and negative transference is acting out, that is taking action and bringing all sorts of thoughts and impulses to life. [...] Therefore, acting out is not only seen in terms of reproduced material (the past), it is also recognised as the necessary expression of an urgent present” (Røine, 1997, p. 74). Citing Ibsen, Røine likens the psychodramatic enactment to “a ‘Battle with Trolls in the Vaults of the Heart and the Mind’” (ibid, p. 35). Just as a creative writer may delve into the depths of his mind and pour his inner battles into fictive storylines, so a protagonist may act out his struggles, battles and visions in a psychodramatic play with his auxiliaries. A successful psychodrama may not only facilitate the resolution of an inner conflict but it may also unleash the ‘hidden essence’ of the protagonist. Moreno, who had experienced a very religious upbringing with both Jewish and Christian influences and who, from a young age, had immersed himself in the writings of numerous philosophers, theologians and mystics, considered this the highest aim of psychodrama: To reach, through acts of spontaneous play and co-creation, a state of divine inspiration in which one could “‘seize the mystery of existence’ and [...] grasp what is essential in life” (ibid, p. 65).

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<sup>5</sup> Members of the group may also stand in as the protagonist’s ‘double’, speaking and acting for the protagonist. Psychodramatists recognise that techniques, such as ‘doubling’, can be dangerous as well as offer profound opportunities for new insight: Doubles may speak out loud what the protagonist may not dare to say, bringing “thoughts that are slumbering beneath the protagonist’s threshold of consciousness to the foreground” (Røine, 1997, p. 44). However, doubles may also be mistaken, projecting their own problems onto the protagonist or misinterpreting a situation in their desire to help. Here, the psychodrama director plays a crucial role, ensuring that the focus of the group and process remains firmly on the needs of the protagonist.

Strong parallels can be drawn between Moreno's ideas and the approach of Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski whose work, according to Røine, came very close to psychodrama. Grotowski encouraged his actors to regard each performance as an "act of revelation, or more precisely, a *declaration of faith*. He has to present his actions on the basis of his own life, an action that moves him, exposes him, reveals him and uncovers him. [...] He should rediscover the ambitions that are in the very depths of his own body" (in Røine, 1997, p. 37). Grotowski's approach is of central importance to this PhD topic and we will return to his ideas when we review key readings in performance studies.

## **Dramatherapy**

Unlike psychodrama which originated in the work of one man (whose original ideas are still the central point of reference today), the emergence of dramatherapy cannot be linked to any one particular person - instead a number of pioneering individuals, such as occupational therapists, psychiatrists, teachers and drama specialists, have contributed to its development over time. In Britain, the earliest examples of the use of drama in health and educational settings can be traced back to the 1930s, e.g. to the work of Peter Slade (1954) who practiced educational drama in Worcester, helping children develop emotional and physical control, confidence and empathy. Similarly Dorothy Heathcote used drama in education, enabling children to develop insight and empathy (e.g. Johnson and O'Neill, 1984).

Across the US and Europe experimentation and application of drama in clinical settings increased following the Second World War, in response to the influx of disabled and traumatised soldiers returning from the war and the demand for new therapeutic approaches (e.g. Jones, 1996, p. 73). The establishment of dramatherapy as a distinct profession unfolded in parallel to psychodrama; and whilst Moreno's ideas had a significant effect on the development of drama in health settings in the United States, British pioneers assert that they did not know of psychodrama in the early stages of their work (ibid). Dramatherapists in the UK generally regard their profession as having emerged in the 1960s, "when so much of the establishment, including the certainties of psychiatry, was under attack by the newly liberated young" (Meldrum, 1994, p. 12). At the time Sue Jennings, now regarded as one of the foremost authorities in the field, established the Remedial Drama Group at a psychiatric hospital in London. In parallel, Marian Lindqvist set up the Sesame Institute which later opened a full-time training programme in drama and movement at Kingsway College. By 1977 dramatherapy had become a distinct field in the UK managed by its own professional body, the British Association for Dramatherapy (BADth).

Whilst psychodrama and dramatherapy share common ground in the use of theatrical space, role play and dramatic enactment, the two approaches differ in two key areas: that is in the way they operate as group therapies and in the specificity of their techniques and structure (Chesner, 1994, p. 118). A psychodrama session largely focuses on the journey of one individual, the protagonist, who travels along a spiral of re-enactment, from the periphery of a problem to the core and back out to the periphery. "As the idea of the spiral indicates it is the intention from the outset to explore a present situation, discover the origins of habitual dysfunctional behaviour in the past, recapture spontaneity, gain insight, and practise a more spontaneous role in the present. The method is extremely powerful and penetrative" (ibid, p. 125). By comparison, in dramatherapy the focus and energy of the group is more likely to shift from person to person as the session and emerging themes progress. The group may work with a myth or legend which acts as the vehicle for group members to explore their own material - whilst in psychodrama clients work more directly with their own story. "In practice this means that the psychodramatist [...] uses a more precise map in structuring the psychodramatic journey, and this reflects a more precise therapeutic intention" (ibid, p. 119) whilst the dramatherapist is less directive and less prominent in the working through of the material.

In terms of technique, psychodramatists have remained loyal to the original ideas of Moreno whilst dramatherapists have cast a wide net, drawing from a range of theatrical traditions, as well as integrating other sources into their practice. Some cite Konstantin Stanislavski, Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Viola Spolin or Jerzy Grotowski as main sources of inspiration. Many take a psychological approach to their work and have integrated specific frameworks - from psychoanalysis, to theories of play and creativity, to client centred therapy, to object relations, to Gestalt psychology. According to Valente & Fontana (1993), C.G. Jung, D.W. Winnicott and Carl Rogers are regarded as the most important authorities relevant to the field in recent years.

In her own model of dramatherapy British pioneer Sue Jennings (e.g. 1998) employs a developmental paradigm which she calls 'Embodiment-Projection-Role'. Jennings asserts that human life is essentially dramatic in nature and that it is our capacity to enlarge our world through physical, projective and later imaginative play which enables us to expand our perceptions of self and others and to grow as persons. Based on her extensive observations of pregnant women, babies and children, Jennings has charted the emergence of play from birth to the age of seven years and she proposes that our capacity to play develops alongside our physical, cognitive and social skills. Embodiment-Projection-Role suggests that our play becomes increasingly complex, moving from body play (movement, voice and sensory play) to projective play (play with objects, drawing, sculpting) to dramatic play (role play, improvisation). Jennings further proposes that we re-visit the play stages throughout our

adolescence, and make choices as adults, often taking up careers which relate to a dominance in one of the stages - Embodiment, Projection, or Role.

Reflecting on the efficacy of dramatherapy, Jennings asserts that it is the intermodal quality of theatre, the bringing together of all forms of play through the interweaving of different media, such as text, stage and costume design and performance, which enables participants to fully express their inner worlds and to expand their vision, to grow larger. "When people in dramatherapy groups are able to make their experience physical and make it larger than life; when they can create enormous masks and effigies; when they can take on mythic roles and characters, we can see that their EPR becomes extended in movement, voice, objects, space, themes and roles. It enables them to transform their experience and go beyond themselves. A metaphysical experience to expand our perceptions of ourselves and the world" (ibid, p. 75).

### **Dramatherapy as Ritual**

Of more immediate relevance to this PhD topic is the anthropological approach to dramatherapy, which is partly inspired by Artaud's and Grotowski's investigations of theatre as ritual. Jennings who takes inspiration from Artaud affirms that dramatherapy "does not place ritual 'out there', as having a rarefied existence of its own, separate from human beings and their corporeality; rather it emphasises [...] the interaction of the physical and metaphysical through the imaginative act" (1994, p. 93). In her model of dramatherapy Jennings "emphasises two realities: everyday reality and dramatic reality, and the dramatherapist's role in assisting the passage or 'transit' from one to the other and back again" (ibid, p. 99). This differentiation is reminiscent of Victor Turner's (e.g. 1982) understanding of ritual as a performative process which exposes the initiands to a period of transition, also referred to as 'margin' or 'limen' (Latin, 'threshold') by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. Turner suggests that in the state of liminality, ritual participants become asocial, meaning that they have been separated and removed from the social containers of their societies and are thus free from social obligations, free from the normative structures of their communities, enabling them to expand their personalities and to adapt to new life circumstances and roles. According to Jennings, the dramatherapist is precisely a ritual guide who separates the client from ordinary reality - initiating him into a liminal state and enabling him to play and be whatever he dreams of being - to return him later to ordinary reality a changed person.

At this point it is important to note that not all play and creative acts lead to deep changes within the person. Turner distinguishes between *liminal* and *liminoid* states, the former of which facilitate deep, permanent transformation in individuals and societies, whilst the latter

only lead to temporary changes. Similarly, the American theatre director Richard Schechner (e.g. 1985) differentiates between transformative and transportative performances, suggesting that the former may lead to permanent change within the actor whilst the latter only move the actor from the ordinary world to the 'performative world' and back.

Turner (1982) suggests that Western industrial societies are pervaded by leisure activities and popular entertainment which promote liminoid, transportative states. "Optation pervades the liminoid phenomenon, obligation the liminal. One is all play and choice, an entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory" (p. 43). Whilst the very word 'entertainment' which derives from *entretenir* (Old French, 'to hold apart') points to the reflexive, invertive and subversive nature of cultural play it is apparent that such play does not automatically lead to transformation. Indeed, play as entertainment only leads us back to the place we know. However, play as ritual may foster liminality and engagement with the unknown: we refer here to ritual as we may find it still in traditional religious and old esoteric systems, asserts Turner. Ritual as we can find it in dramatherapy which facilitates a deep self-scrutiny through expressive performance<sup>6</sup>, suggests Jennings.

### **Dramatherapy as Shamanism**

A number of dramatherapists have explored the connections between their practice and shamanism, comparing the role of the dramatherapist to the traditional priest-healer who would go into a trance state and symbolically enact a person's illness and its roots. Snow (2009) asserts that there are fundamental correlations between dramatherapy and shamanic healing rituals. He cites a cross-cultural study by Lucile Hoerr Charles (1953) which proposes that "the shaman's chief function in exorcism of the sick is psychotherapeutic; his method is dramatic" (p. 120). The literature which relates shamanism to the origins of theatre and acting is substantial (e.g. Bates, 1987; Cole, 1975; Karafistan, 2003; Schechner, 1977). Snow refers to Kirby (1975) who has "clearly demonstrated how the shaman's therapeutic enactment is the beginning of theatrical role playing" (Snow, 2009, p. 121). The shaman's healing of the sick is a performance which includes an "impressive setting and lighting, costume and make-up, theatrical properties and sound effects ... possession of or battle with the shaman by the spirits through ecstasy and frenzy which may be considered a supreme example of dramatic improvisation, often with elaborate use of voice, dialogue, and body pantomime" (Charles, 1953, p. 96). Similarly, Bates (1987) speaks of possession as a central experience of the actor's way in traditional performance styles, such as the Balinese theatre or Japanese Noh.

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<sup>6</sup> Incidentally the term performance stems from Old French, *parfournir*, meaning 'to complete' or 'carry out thoroughly'.

“Traditional actors in Bali today believe that when they enter trance states, spiritual beings are able to descend to earth and live through the actor’s body for the duration of the performance. People watching the actors see them as spirits. The spiritual beings portrayed by the actors have particular personalities and are like stock characters. The behaviour of the actor-as-spirit corresponds to the expected behaviour of that particular deity” (p. 27). Furthermore, “[T]he traditional actor’s state of possession is a powerful phenomenon, which alters the actor’s behaviour and experience to that of the ‘spirit’; but it is nevertheless a *performance*. It is a controlled possession. The traditional actor has a double consciousness; one part is possessed, the other observes and controls” (pp. 71/ 72). Bates admits that actors today, particularly those in the West, do not generally think of themselves as possessed by their characters. Nonetheless he asserts that elements of possession, such as strong emotion, trance and unusual perceptual experiences, are commonly present in many actors’ working experiences. In such assertions Bates is not alone. Many actors and directors have encountered altered states of consciousness in their work (e.g. Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2005), alluding to states of ‘trance’ (Johnstone, 1989; Lendra, 1997), ‘irradiation’ (Stanislavski, 1989) and ‘translumination’ (Grotowski, 1991). Similarly, Jennings (1994) asserts that in dramatherapy “some degree of trance is always present: whether a slight degree of absorption or engagement, or an altered state of consciousness” (p. 99). Snow refers to Cole (1975) who “compares the trance flight of a shaman to a spiritual realm [...] with the actor’s entry into the mythological and symbolic work of the play script” (Snow, 2009, p. 121). Snow highlights that whilst the shaman performs possession and trance flight in service of healing the client, the actor performs in service of the audience. Jennings (1994) further likens the anthropological debate regarding spirit possession and shamanic journeying to the theatrical debate “concerning the nature of character and role: whether one allows a role to inhabit the self, or whether one goes into a role? Does a role come into me or do I go into a role?” (p. 99). Inasmuch as such questions go to the core of how theatre practice can become transformative, they are of central importance to this PhD and we shall explore them further when we come to review key readings in performance studies.

Whilst affirming the resemblances between the actor’s craft and shamanic practice, Snow and others (e.g. Pendzik, 1988) suggest that today’s actors do not generally make use of the healing potential of theatre. “Shamans seem to be aware of the fact that that which is performed in the imaginal world has a healing potential, while actors generally do not make much of this potential. In this regard, drama therapists may be more like shamans than actors” (Pendzik in Snow, 2009, p. 120). Whilst this may be true in mainstream theatre and television, there are exceptions to the rule, such as the Australian director Jade McCutcheon (e.g. 2001) who has actively inquired into the shamanic dimensions of modern theatre practice. This PhD study further features the work of established theatre practitioners who are



not therapists but who are nonetheless clearly aware of the transformative dimensions of their work.

Karafistan (2003) also highlights that shamanism does not only revolve around the healing of individuals but that shamans provide catharsis for their communities, transmitting their creative trance as to transport their audiences “out of their ordinary, everyday reality into other cosmic regions, where they themselves can experience the profound mysteries of birth, death, life, and regeneration” (p. 152). Karafistan asserts that “[I]n this way, the shaman is the stimulator of the collective imagination, the one who makes sense of experience and puts into perspective the lives and deaths of his community. This is also the contemporary role of the artist today” (ibid).

## **Theatre and Transformation**

We have explored notions of ritual and transformation within the realm of theatre as therapy. The spectrum of theatre as a transformative practice is much broader, however. In the following section we will visit the ideas of seminal theatre directors who have contributed to the investigation of theatre as a work on the self, with a particular emphasis on the spiritual or religious sources which have shaped their work. The themes of theatre, spirituality and self-development are tremendously rich and multi-layered and multi-factorial, and there are too many practitioners to be considered in depth - and any attempt at an overly inclusive overview would only result in a statement of the obvious and superficial. I have therefore decided to focus my review on the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, as well as on those whose practices can be related to aspects of his work. Some have come before him and inspired him, others followed in his lineage, others again had no direct relationship with him but explored similar territory.

No other individual has driven and motivated me to pursue my PhD research as has Jerzy Grotowski. From the moment I ‘met’ the man in his writings I was riveted, compelled and inspired by his vision. I felt a kinship, a deep resonance in Grotowski’s passions and my own. Over the following pages I shall trace Grotowski’s ideas in detail, integrating other theatre practitioners’ ideas and work where appropriate. Above all I shall feature Grotowski’s approach so substantially in this literature review because of its central relevance to my research. Not only is Grotowski my theatrical Animus, he is also the foremost creative ancestor of many of my co-researchers: Antero Alli and ParaTheatrical Research, Matt Mitler and Dzieci, Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret, Ang Gey Pin and the Workcenter are all creative children of Grotowski. Their artistic pursuits cannot be grasped and situated without some detailed knowledge of Grotowski’s life-long endeavours which unfolded over four decades

around the globe and in intimate encounters with numerous performance traditions and spiritual systems.

### **Antonin Artaud and the Avant-Garde**

To set the scene I would like to begin before Grotowski, with the ideas of the French poet and theatre visionary Antonin Artaud (1896 - 1948). Artaud famously challenged the status quo of European theatre which he described as overly psychological and representational in its approach. As would Jerzy Grotowski several decades later, Artaud called for the development of a theatre of lived myth and ritual, which could simultaneously fascinate and terrify, and which could inject a sense of metaphysical dread into the heart of the spectator - to the end that the spectator's psychic energy could be released, liberated and transformed. Comparing theatre to the plague which challenges the human organism to the limit, Artaud (1999) asserted that "A real stage play upsets our sensual tranquillity, releases our suppressed subconscious, drives us to a potential rebellion..." (p. 19). Artaud called his vision a 'Theatre of Cruelty'. Knapp (1980) emphasises that by 'cruelty' Artaud did not mean 'blood' or 'carnage'. Instead cruelty referred to the idea that multiplicity and conscious individuality bring with them antagonism, suffering, cruelty. "[E]verything that is not dormant in life is cruel. When Brahma, for example, left his state of rest, he suffered. When a child is born, it knows pain. Death, transformation, fire, love, appetite are all *cruelties*" (p. 91). Artaud believed that the Theatre of Cruelty must compel the spectator to reach inward and to confront the painful reality of his existence.

Artaud was a leading figure of the avant-garde movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which sought to liberate the individual from the bonds of the intellect and the rigidities of bourgeois culture, promoting a radical, original anarchism which had little to do with "bearded, bomb-throwing terrorists" and "could best be described as extreme individualism." Avant-garde artists asserted that "personal rights totally superseded those of the state [...] and all set rules that prescribed behaviour ('being') had to be discarded for a fluid sense of individual fulfilment ('becoming')" (Innes, 1993, p. 6). Innes expands that personal liberation "came to be conceived psychologically or even spiritually, rather than as an external condition, although the route to its achievement was frequently physical - freeing the mind through assaulting the senses" (ibid).

Embracing the Freudian revolution, some avant-garde artists, in particular the Surrealists, exalted the unconscious dimensions of the psyche and attempted to create art as an antidote to a civilization which had almost exclusively emphasised the rational at the expense of the irrational and the emotional. Avant-garde art revolved around the "exploitation of

irrationality, the exploration of dream states, the borrowing of archaic dramatic models, mythological material or tribal rituals" (ibid, p. 9), with the aim of achieving a renewed psychic mobility that would allow the artist "to reach the total psychological scope of which consciousness [i.e. egoic awareness, JB] is only a small part" (Breton in Ades, 1995, p. 129).

Artaud was specifically inspired by the Balinese dance-drama which he experienced only once in Paris in 1931 and which he regarded as possessing a magical, delirious quality which could induce irrational spontaneity in the actor and facilitate a cathartic, emotional purgation within the spectator (see Artaud, 1999, pp. 39 - 54). In his own theatrical productions Artaud attempted to capture the spirit of Balinese theatre, in the hope that his work would facilitate an exorcism of repressive behaviour patterns in the individual and thus in society. The avant-garde regarded the transformation of individuals as the prerequisite to social change, a view which is still cherished today by many of the theatre practitioners whom I encountered as part of my research. As the Italian director Eugenio Barba puts it, "Our craft is the possibility of changing ourselves, and thus changing society" (in Innes, 1993, p. 11), or the American director Richard Schechner, "the ambition to make theatre into ritual is nothing other than a wish to make performance efficacious, to use [theatrical] events to change people" (ibid).

Attempts to rediscover the ritual function of theatre pervade much of Western drama in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Innes lists a wide variety of examples which furthermore highlight the particular impact of Eastern ritualistic performance styles on Western artistic innovation - from the Swedish playwright and novelist August Strindberg who was influenced by eastern mysticism, to British director Peter Brook who has borrowed eclectically from many non-European sources, such as the Indian Kathakali dance-drama or Sufism. Kathakali, together with Japanese Noh, also influenced Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, as well as the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor and the American director Robert Wilson (ibid, p. 18).

When exploring Artaud's approach in practical terms it is helpful to situate his methods amongst the techniques used by the surrealists, most of whom were writers and visual artists. Surrealism was initially a literary movement created by the French writer André Breton, which soon expanded into the visual and performing arts and which for some time firmly embraced Artaud's ideas. According to Breton, the surrealist's pursuit revolved around the exploration of methods which could facilitate "[P]ure psychic automatism through which it is intended to express [...] the true functioning of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason and outside any aesthetic or moral preoccupation" (Breton in Ades, 1995, p. 124). In the early stages of the movement the surrealists experimented with drugs and hypnotism to tap into unconscious material, however, soon the mechanical aids were abandoned in favour of artistic techniques which were less volatile and more reliable. Surrealists owe much to Freud's psychoanalytical practice which employed free association

and dream analysis as the primary ways of accessing the Unconscious. The term 'automatism' indicates that the surrealists also owed a good deal to the work of mediums and their 'automatic writing'. "Both Ernst and Dali were to stress their passivity in front of their work, comparing themselves with mediums. However, when the Surrealists talk about the 'beyond' they do not mean to imply the supernatural, like the mediums' messages from the dead, but rather things which are beyond the bounds of immediate reality but which can be revealed to us by our unconscious or by our senses in a state of heightened sensibility" (Ades, 1995, p. 126). The term 'automatism' brings to mind the work of Arthur Deikman (1966) on 'de-automatisation'. On the basis of the terms alone one might think that de-automatisation and automatism are conflicting concepts. However, they are referring to two complementary processes which can become means to the same end: According to Deikman, de-automatisation refers to a loosening of established perceptual and motor processes (which have become automatic and thus require little or no conscious awareness to be performed) by means of "by reinvesting actions and percepts with attention". Deikman studied meditation and contemplative practice as the chief means by which to achieve such de-automatisation. Similarly, as we have seen automatism refers to the cultivation of heightened awareness - to the end that contents of the unconscious may become available to consciousness. As such, the Surrealists 'automatism' may be regarded as promoting de-automatisation. The Surrealists played with language and image, using automatic writing, as well as automatic drawing, collage, frottage<sup>7</sup>, text montage and photo montage as ways of entering into a heightened state of sensibility. It seems that Artaud's contemporaries failed to recognise that theatrical methods, too, could facilitate heightened awareness and effectively trigger revelation of unconscious material within the actor - an area which was later extensively explored by Grotowski and which we will come to examine in depth. The lack of appreciation of theatre on the part of the Surrealists is perhaps not surprising, considering that Artaud's primary focus whilst directing was not on the actor but on the spectator whom he aimed to set on edge, shock and awaken (a venture which Grotowski would later dismiss as unachievable), leading him to concentrate excessively on the precise staging of his productions and restricting any free expression on the part of the actors. Indeed, Artaud's aim was "to bring every element of a performance, including the script, under his rigid control [...] Hence his wish for a system of notating gestures, facial expressions, attitudes, movements, tonal variations and breathing, and his search for ways of making these subtleties of expression exact, controllable and reproducible" (Innes, 1993, pp. 63/ 64). In stark contrast, Artaud's approach to direction was "a kind of introspection; he seemed to listen attentively to the promptings of his subconscious. At the first rehearsal, Artaud rolled around on the stage, assumed a falsetto voice, contorted himself, howled, and fought against logic, order, and the 'well-made' approach" (Rouleau in Innes, 1993, p. 64). According to Knapp (1980) Artaud regarded the

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<sup>7</sup> Frottage, as developed by Max Ernst, refers to a process of creating images by laying paper over a textured material, such as wood, and rubbing across the paper with pencil... (Ades, 1995, p. 128)

director of a play as a magician, a high priest, a “Demiurge” (p. 94) who would bring about the unity of all theatrical elements, animate the spectacle and weave the overarching dramatic pattern which would bring the spectacle to life and act directly and profoundly upon the spectator.

Whilst Artaud regarded the director as the central creator of any production he felt that the actor must do likewise with his role, infusing his life energy into the fictive character. In this assertion Artaud resembled his contemporary Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski who believed that ideal acting ought spring from the ‘subconscious’<sup>8</sup>, and who developed a number of psychophysical techniques which would enable the actor to tap into his ‘subconscious forces’, so that he may be able to live the part, “completed carried away by the play [...] not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively” (Stanislavski in Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2005, p. 60). In the early stages of his work Stanislavski encouraged his actors to use their own memories as creative material for their roles and he developed the technique known as emotion-memory through which actors drew on their past experiences to access genuine emotions with which they could bring alive their fictive characters. Stanislavski proposed that emotion-memory could be stimulated by an actor’s awareness and adoption of a character’s specific tempo-rhythm, the pattern of movement and speech required for the role and the circumstances of the play. Stanislavski believed that tempo-rhythm is closely related to one’s feelings, one’s ‘inward existence’. “Every human passion, every state of being, every experience has its tempo-rhythms” (ibid, p. 62).

Artaud, in turn, proposed that effective portrayal of a role would come about through ‘an affective athleticism’ on the part of the actor. In his essay bearing the same title Artaud asserted that every emotion can be located precisely in the body and that it is an actor’s task “to become conscious of these localisations of affective thought” (Artaud, 1999, p. 93). Artaud believed that “the soul’s flowing substantiality is indispensable to the actor’s craft. To know that an emotion is substantial, subject to the plastic vicissitudes of matter, gives him control over his passions, extending our sovereign command” (ibid, p. 90). He further suggested that the pressure points which supported physical exertion were also the points of emergence of affective thought and that for the actor “[T]o become conscious of physical obsession, muscles brushed by emotion, amounts to unleashing that emotion powerfully, and [...] gives it secret, deep, unusually violent volume” (ibid, p. 93).

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<sup>8</sup> Applying a Freudian topography of the psyche, Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005) suggests that with the term ‘subconscious’ Stanislavski meant to imply preconscious contents of the psyche, which are not yet available to consciousness but can be made available (pp. 64/65).

Artaud's writings are sketchy and more visionary than pragmatic, giving rise to more questions than answers. However, the idea which Artaud seeds here and which we will encounter again in Grotowski's work, the idea that it is the actor's task to become conscious of the emergence of affective thought in the body, is one which finds strong resonance in many forms of therapy today. In particular this principle has been further developed in dance/ movement therapies, such as Authentic Movement, which promotes self-directed movement through which the mover taps into and gives expression to cellular impulses. As pioneering movement therapist Mary Starks Whitehouse (2005a) elucidates, "Where does movement come from? It originates in what Laban calls an inner effort - that is, a specific inner impulse having the quality of *sensation*. This impulse leads outward into space so that movement becomes visible as physical action. [...] It is here that the most dramatic psychophysical connections are made available to consciousness" (p. 52). Likewise psychodrama and dramatherapy recognise the dynamic connection between the body and unconscious dimensions of the psyche. Both regard physical symptoms as communicators of inner conflict and tension and bring unconscious processes onto the stage. However, parallels between Artaud and modern dance and drama therapies must be drawn with caution. Artaud, for example, suggested that there were a limited number of "crude outlets" or "pressure points" (1999, p. 94) for human emotions - an idea which, I am certain, Authentic Movement therapists, and also Grotowski for that matter, would reject.

Artaud further asserted that every emotion had a corresponding breath, and he proposed a system of breathing through which the actor could voluntarily and spontaneously invoke specific feelings. "I stress the word spontaneous, since breathing revives life, infusing fire into its matter" (p. 91). Artaud believed that through his lungs the actor could re-connect to his true origins and breathe life into his role - his theatrical Double - just as in original Creation "God had breathed 'a living breath' into Adam" (Knapp, 1980, p. 96). Artaud claims that he borrowed his system of breathing from the Kabbalah, putting forward a list of six breathing patterns, consisting of a varying combination of neuter, masculine and feminine breath. However, Artaud's depictions of the 'system' beyond this list are vague and no sources are given, and so to trace the origins of these ideas is a precarious business. Still, it is reasonable to suggest, as does Nair (2007) that Artaud attempted to use breath as a means to stimulate heightened states of consciousness. Nair sees close links between Artaud's ideas and Siddha Yoga: "In both the idea of the existence of extended levels of consciousness is conceptualised as the result of a particular way or mode of breathing that goes beyond the ordinary levels of nostril breathing. It is internalised breathing..." (p. 174).

Nair further highlights similarities between Artaud's and Konstantin Stanislavski's approaches, who also advocated for the integration of breath in acting, regarding breath as a "vital source of non-verbal physical communication" and understanding it as "the key dynamic element

working between daily and extra-daily consciousness by uniting the *revealed* and the *unrevealed* into an extended level of consciousness" (ibid). Beyond exploring the experimentations of such theatre giants as Artaud and Stanislavski, Nair emphasises that the role of the breath in actor training and performance is still under investigation today (e.g. Malekin & Yarrow, 1997; Brask & Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2010) and that it plays an important part in our understanding of actor consciousness and the psychosomatic impact of theatre.

However fragmented, ambiguous and incomplete, Artaud's writings remain stirring and compelling for many theatre practitioners and therapists. In her approach to dramatherapy Sue Jennings has drawn extensively from the work of Artaud, finding inspiration in his search for a new language through play with sound, incantation, movement and scenic rhythm and in his desire to create carnivalesque, larger-than-life spectacles which blur the boundaries between life and art.

In mainstream theatre Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz have conducted the perhaps most thorough practical investigation of Artaud's ideas at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Between 1963 and 1964 they created exercises stimulated by Artaud's writings, which would impose drastic conditions upon the actors, restricting their means of communication (e.g. one actor would face away from the other who had to communicate his wishes to the first, however, no words were allowed, only sounds) or limiting their physical expression (e.g. an actor had to communicate an idea but was only allowed to use one part of his body, etc.). Brook (1968) recalls that an imaginary fight in pairs was a very valuable exercise,

"taking and giving back every blow, but never being allowed to touch, never moving the head, nor the arms, nor feet. In other words a movement of the torso is all that is allowed: no realistic contact can take place, yet a fight must be engaged physically and emotionally and carried through. Such exercises should not be thought of as gymnastics - freeing muscular resistance is only a by-product - the purpose all the time is to increase resistance - by limiting alternatives - and then using this resistance in the struggle for a true expression. The principle is one of rubbing two sticks together: this friction of unyielding opposites makes fire..." (pp. 56 - 57).

Brook and company also experimented with silence and with ritualistic, repetitive patterns, slowly working towards new, wordless languages and finding new forms of expression for the actors' impulses - all towards one aim: to make the invisible visible through the performer's presence. However, Brook has long realised that this aim only opens the door. It marks the beginning of a long journey of training and rehearsal for the ensemble - and when we come to performance, the meeting of actor and spectator, it is another matter altogether. Brook elucidates, "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed: betrayed because it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited, betrayed because it is easier to apply rules to the work of a

handful of dedicated actors than to the lives of the unknown spectators who happen by chance to come through the theatre door” (pp. 60 - 61). Moreover, as Brook points out, a theatre of cruelty which only shocks in its aim to awaken and transform the spectator, using “crumbs of Zen to assert that [...] a slap on the face, a tweak of the nose or a custard pie are all equally Buddha” (pp. 62 - 63) amounts to nothing. One moment there may be an opportunity for a deeper meeting - the next the spectator will slip back into inertia, and in the end continuous shocks will make the spectator indifferent, “he starts willingly and is assaulted into apathy” (p. 62). As such, Brook asserts that beyond the call to ‘Wake up!’ a “holy theatre” must not only present the invisible but “also offer[s] conditions that make its perception possible” (p. 63). Ultimately, such theatre must aid the invisible to “penetrate and animate the ordinary” (p. 64) - an aim which is perhaps too elusive to be widely achievable: requiring too lengthy and rigorous a training on the part of today’s actor who is accustomed to hopping from one production to another within a matter of months; and requiring too in-depth and intense a meeting between the actor and spectator as can be achieved within an evening’s performance.

By 1970 another theatre director came to a similar conclusion, realising that a performance practice which aimed at profound levels of self-examination would be best pursued outside the bounds of conventional theatre, without audiences, amongst actors alone. His name was Jerzy Grotowski.

### **Theatre as a work on the self: Jerzy Grotowski**

Throughout his theatrical career Grotowski spent much time immersing himself in the study of Eastern philosophies - Confucianism, Taoism, Zen-Buddhism and the Advaita-Vedanta (Osiński, 1986, p. 23) - as well as journeying to Central Asia, India and China where “Like G.I. Gurdjieff - a figure resembling Grotowski in key ways [...] he [met] ‘remarkable people’ acquire[d] esoteric knowledge, practice[d] yoga” (Schechner, 1997c, p. 463). Though driven in his artistic explorations by thematic concerns which can be connected to his study of Eastern philosophies, it is important to note that Grotowski never strove to re-create an authentic Eastern theatre. Instead, his early work - much like Artaud’s - revolved around the aim to revitalise the European theatre by devising new ritual performance structures rooted in a system of signs which could function within the European theatre and offer its audiences an Occidental equivalent to the highly structured forms of ‘ritual acting’ Grotowski had encountered in the East. The director described his early theatrical intents as follows:

“The mythological patron of the old Indian theatre was Shiva, the Cosmic Dancer, who, dancing, ‘gives birth’ to all that is and who ‘shatters’ all that is; and who ‘dances the whole.’ ... If I had to define our theatrical quest in one



sentence, with one term, I would refer to the myth about the dance of Shiva. I would say: 'We are playing at being Shiva. We are acting out Shiva.' ... This is a dance of form, the pulsation of form, the fluid diffusion of the multiplicity of theatrical conventions, styles, acting traditions. [...] The ancient Indian theatre, as the Japanese and Greek theatres, was not a 'presentation' of reality (that is, a constructing of illusions), but rather a dancing of reality. [...] We do not demonstrate action to the viewer; we invite him ... to take part in the 'shamanism' in which the living, immediate presence of the viewer is part of the playacting. [...] There is the mythological quotation: 'Shiva says ... I am without name, without form, and without action. ... I am pulse, movement, rhythm' (Shiva-Gita). The essence of the theatre we are seeking is 'pulse, movement, and rhythm' (Grotowski in Osiński, 1986, p. 49)

The search for such a theatre was Grotowski's life-long ambition. As his theatrical disciple, the Italian director Eugenio Barba (1999) asserts, "The dance of Shiva of which Grotowski speaks is not a metaphor. It is a personal vision of existence which, on the actor's technical level is translated as organicity (pulsation and rhythm, [perhaps comparable to Stanislavski's concept of tempo-rhythm, JB]), on a dramaturgical level as the simultaneous presence of opposites (dialectic of apotheosis and derision)<sup>9</sup> and on an aesthetic level as performance which refuses to give into the illusion of reality and attempts to recreate the contractions, the dilations and the contrasts: its 'dance'" (p. 55). Grotowski sought a theatre which could incarnate myth, which could offer to the spectator enactments which were direct and confrontational, and which would thus crack open the individuals' masks - so that a more intimate layer of the human experience would be exposed.

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<sup>9</sup> In comparing the Asian theatre with Grotowski's work, Ritchie (1997) points out that there is always a double meaning in Grotowski's productions - and that "Asian theatre, however, is singularly innocent of this. A piece of cloth waved is a sea in Peking but it is not anything else unless it changes its character entirely and becomes a cloak or a table. Things do not have two meanings in Asia. They have only - and this is important - their ostensible meaning. There is no more irony, consequently, in Asian theatre than there is in Asia. The ostensible meaning is the only meaning. The social mask is the face" (p. 148). Ritchie elaborates,

"The Asian knows perfectly well that there is no such thing as personality, that there is barely any such thing as person. The use of masks - real ones in the Noh, painted ones in Kabuki and in China, use of muscles to simulate masks as in Kathakali or Malayan theatre - is indicative of the need to fabricate personality in the theatre. 'I am the kind of person who ...' is not a common concept in Asia. The emphasis is so entirely upon being that becoming, in the sense of having a coherent personality to become, is not a thought widely encountered. Personality is identified with a mask. Grotowski and his actors come from the other side of the world, where the idea of personality is insisted upon by Greeks and Christians alike. His ideas of personality, at its fullest, is that one person may play several parts or that the muscular 'masks' may be changed in accordance with a part or with an emotion to be expressed. [...] Grotowski, like the rest of us in the West, lives in a relative world where it is possible for us to entertain the idea of one person being several simply because we are so certain about the core, the personality, the identity of this person. Or were. One of the reasons that Grotowski's theatre has become so suddenly meaningful is that we now commonly doubt our identities, at the same time finding that we have nothing else to believe in" (ibid, pp. 148/ 149).

Eugenio Barba (1999) expands,

“There is a constant and complementary double aspect to Grotowski’s theatre work. On the one hand the performance is a ‘lay’ ritual, enveloping actors and spectators in a special osmosis and making them meditate on the wounds of the human condition. [...] On the other hand, there is a secret tension going beyond the artistic and social value of the performance towards a religiosity (not religion) which, for as long as I have known Grotowski, has been connected above all to Hinduism. It is in this tension which, through aesthetics and technique, has pushed him towards transgression, a key word in Grotowski’s terminology during the Opole<sup>10</sup> years. The performance is an act of transgression that allows us to break down our barriers, transcend our limits, fill our emptiness, fulfil ourselves, enter into the territory of the sacrum” (pp. 40/ 41).

Between 1957 and 1969 Grotowski dedicated his artistic energies to the exploration and explication of how such theatre could be achieved in practice. In his book *Towards a Poor Theatre*, first published in English in 1968, Grotowski described how his ambition for a theatre as a place of direct communion between actor and spectator led him to abandon representative scenery and music, as well as elaborate make-up and costumes, focusing instead on textual montage, on the redesign of the performance space (bringing actors and spectators into close contact with one another) and on the experimentation with psychophysical exercises which could enhance the authenticity of the actors’ character portrayal.

In terms of actor training, Grotowski predominantly synthesised elements of Stanislavski’s work, Meyerhold’s bio-mechanics, French and Polish mime, and yoga. Grotowski was particularly drawn toward Stanislavski and his ‘method of physical actions’. After years of “theoretical analysis of scenes, historical research of texts, and deep dissection of the human being as a thinking, feeling, experiencing, and emoting organism” (Merlin, 1999, p. 228) Stanislavski had come to reject his earlier experiments with emotion-memory and he believed that an actor’s preparation for authentic performance was best achieved by simply letting him do the scene and find his line of physical actions. It was this focus upon an actor’s physical line of actions which Grotowski regarded as the most precious pearl of Stanislavsky’s system and which became his own starting point for a journey which would lead him to explore in depth the profound connections between ‘outer action’ and ‘inner action’ as the vehicle for a work on oneself and as a means to transcend the duality of mind and body. As Grotowski (1991) puts it,

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<sup>10</sup> Opole is a small town in the northwest of Poland where Grotowski’s company was based in the early years.

“the method we are developing is not a combination of techniques borrowed from these sources (although we sometimes adapt them for our use). [...] The education of an actor in our theatre is not a matter of teaching him something; we attempt to eliminate his organism’s resistance to this psychic process. The result is freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses. Ours then is a **via negativa**<sup>11</sup> - not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks. Years of work and of specially composed exercises (which, by means of physical, plastic and vocal training, attempt to guide the actor towards the right kind of concentration) sometimes permit the discovery of the beginning of this road...” (pp. 16-17).

Grotowski aimed for a stripping away of the actor’s daily mask or persona which, he asserted, would lead the actor towards “liberation from complexes in much the same way as psycho-analytic therapy” (1991, p. 46). Grotowski further believed that such liberation would lead the actor towards a state of grace and ‘translumination’, in which, at the most intense moments of self-revelation, the actor would transcend his self and “the soul would literally shine through the flesh” (Innes, 1993, p. 153). Grotowski wanted to achieve an extreme intimacy between actor and spectator, in which the actor would make “a total gift of himself. This is a technique of the ‘trance’ and of the integration of all the actor’s psychic and bodily powers which emerge from the most intimate layers of his being...” (1991, p. 16). Schechner (1997a) proposes that Grotowski’s approach assumed “that what is most intimate and hidden in each individual, what is core or deep or secret, is the same as what is most archetypal or universal. In other words, to search out the ‘intimate, most personal self’ is to find the Universal Self” (p. 27). Similarly, Innes (1993) suggests that according to Grotowski, humanity has collective, generic roots. “Hence any true manifestation of unconscious psycho-physical reactions will automatically correspond to Jungian archetypes” (p. 153).

Grotowski further elucidated that the actor’s self-search related to the development of special anatomy, seeking relationship with specific areas in the body as sources of energy, such as the abdomen and the solar plexus. The emphasis on the abdomen as a point of energy brings to mind Eastern martial arts systems, such as Tai Chi Chuan which with Grotowski was acquainted, Qigong, or Aikido - which centre around the development of awareness of one’s

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<sup>11</sup> Grotowski’s ideas around the *via negativa* were based on Nagarjuna’s doctrine of *Sunyata*. “*Sunyata*, the Void, is not nothingness. It is non-duality in which the object does not differ from the subject. The self and belief in the self are the causes of error and pain. The way to escape from error and pain is to eliminate the self. This is the Perfect Wisdom, the enlightenment that can be attained through a *via negativa*, denying worldly categories and phenomenons [should be phenomena, JB] to the point of denying the self and, by so doing, reaching the Void. [...] In *Towards a Poor Theatre* Grotowski applied this vision to the actor: ‘The requisite state of mind is a passive readiness to realise an active role, a state in which one does not *want to do something but rather cannot help doing it*’ (Barba, 1999, p. 49).

*dāntián* (Chinese) or *tanden* (Japanese, 'red field').<sup>12</sup> Within these systems the *tanden* is regarded as the central seat of life energy, *ki* - and it is also referred to as *kikai tanden* (*kikai*, Japanese, 'ocean of *ki*'). Disciples of these systems are encouraged to act from the *tanden*, which is regarded not only as their physical centre of gravity but also as the dwelling place of their inner essence. Grotowski's work became progressively rooted in traditional systems of healing and self-development and we shall explore these connections in greater depth when we come to Grotowski's work phase known as Theatre of Sources.

Grotowski also emphasised that inner liberation and expression must be accompanied by a mastery of 'form'. He believed that undisciplined self-penetration could only lead to 'biological chaos'. Thus, "the more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us, [...] in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign" (1991, p. 39).

Two chapters in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1991) are dedicated to the explication of the techniques used by Grotowski and his actors, the first of which (pp. 101 - 141) gives details of exercises used between 1959 and 1962; and the second of which (pp. 143 - 172) shows the evolution of these exercises through notes taken during a course given by Grotowski and one of his main actors, Ryszard Ciésłak, in 1966. The exercises in the first chapter range from warm-ups of the muscles and vertebral column to leaps and somersaults, to vocal and breathing exercises. They were recorded by Eugenio Barba who was Grotowski's assistant director from January 1962 until 1965 and whose own work has played a part in my research. In his depiction of the actor training regime Barba makes specific reference to Hatha Yoga in the description of headstands (p. 105) and respiratory exercises (p. 117). In his use of yoga Grotowski followed Stanislavski who had a strong interest in Hinduism and who had studied Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga and integrated exercises into his system (e.g. Wegner, 1976)<sup>13</sup>. Citing Magarshack, Wegner elucidates that Stanislavski specifically explored yogic notions 'mental concentration' which "supplied him with one of the most important elements of his own system - the circle of public solitude [...] into which the actor has to withdraw in order to keep his attention concentrated on the stage and not on the audience" (p. 86). Stanislavski regarded the breathing practices of Pranayama Yoga as the "foundation of the development

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<sup>12</sup> The Most traditional Japanese disciplines tend to speak of a single *tanden* which is located in the *hara* (Japanese, 'belly'). However, some schools of thought of Chinese origin differentiate between three *tandens*: The upper *tanden* (*jo tanden*) located in the head between the eyes and associated with the pituitary gland; the middle *tanden* (*chu tanden*) located in the chest and associated with the thymus gland; and the lower *tanden* (*ge tanden* or *seika tanden*) located in the abdomen approximately three finger widths below the navel.

<sup>13</sup> A number of Stanislavski's students, among them Yevgeny Vakhtangov and Michael Chekov, also studied yoga and integrated yogic principles into their work.

of introspective attention” (Chang in Wegner, 1976, p. 89). Wegner asserts that both in Tantric Buddhism and Stanislavski’s system, Pranayama practice, the ‘circle of attention’ and the submission to imaginary circumstances are conjoined. Grotowski described his own initial confrontations with yoga as less fruitful:

“...we began by doing Yoga directed towards absolute concentration. Is it true, we asked, that yoga can give actors the power of concentration? We observed that despite all our hopes the opposite happened. There was a certain concentration, but it was introverted. This concentration destroys all expression; it’s an internal sleep, an inexpressive equilibrium: a great rest which ends all actions. This should have been obvious because the goal of yoga is to stop three processes: thought, breathing and ejaculation. That means all life processes are stopped and one finds fullness and fulfilment in conscious death, autonomy enclosed in our own kernel. I don’t attack it, but it’s not for actors. But we also observed that certain yoga positions help very much the natural reactions of the spinal column; they lead to a sureness of one’s body, a natural adaptation to space. So why get rid of them? Just change all their currents. We began to search, to look for different types of contact in these exercises” (Grotowski in Schechner & Hoffman, 1997, pp. 44/45).<sup>14</sup>

Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005, pp. 111 - 112) suggests that Grotowski’s struggle with yoga was most likely rooted in unfortunate choice: Grotowski seems to have chosen to explore yoga exercises with his actors which promoted introverted concentration, blocking the actor from doing his work. Rather, Meyer-Dinkgräfe explains, Grotowski should have worked with exercises which promote a refinement of consciousness even in ordinary activity, thus enabling the actor to maintain a state of *samadhi* whilst carrying out his work.

Grotowski continued to develop his approach to actor training with the ensemble which in the English speaking world became known as the Polish Laboratory Theatre. Initially the exercises were connected to specific productions and abandoned once the staging of that particular production had been accomplished. However, from the staging of *Akropolis* in 1962, the actors continued with their daily training regime, and the exercises (in acrobatics, composition, breath and voice) gained an autonomy of their own. As the ensemble’s proficiency deepened and as they travelled further and deeper into the field of authentic encounter, the number of spectators in each production decreased: from 65 for *Kordian* in 1962 to only 25 for *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* in 1968. However, it was already with the staging of *The Constant Prince* in 1965 that the theatrical search of Grotowski and had reached its zenith and had catapulted itself into a realm beyond performance. As Innes (1993) describes,

“the ‘*via negativa*’ - Grotowski’s reduction of the theatrical performance to its essence by a process of ‘distillation’ and ‘contradiction’ - had led to the virtual elimination of plot and character. Instead of an imaginary action, *The Constant Prince* had become an experiment in laying bare the essential spiritual nature of man by sacrificing the body. It was a psychological dissection that [...] could only proceed if the actors had generated sufficient spiritual intensity on each preceding level. Instead of conventional characterizations, roles were developed from improvisations. In these the performers searched for their basic impulses as individuals in reaction to the demands of the group situation, creating a personal ‘score’ rather than projecting themselves as actors into a fictional ‘other’. [...] What remained was the actor as an example of spiritual potential, and the cathartic ‘communion’ with the spectator” (pp. 162 - 163).

However, even this communion between actor and spectator appeared at heart a fraudulent enterprise, considering the inherent artificiality of the relationship and the imposed passivity on part of the spectator. And so, in 1970, at the height of his theatrical career, Grotowski realised that he could only mend the split by eliminating the distinction between the actor and the audience. His next step along the path would lead him to engage only with actors as equal doers and sharers in *paratheatre*.

### **Paratheatre (1970 - 1978)**

With our exploration of paratheatre we arrive at another crucial element of this PhD. It was Grotowski’s paratheatrical work phase which inspired Antero Alli to set up ParaTheatrical ReSearch and pursue his own experiments. Similarly, Matt Mitler was profoundly touched by his experiences of Grotowski’s and Ciésłak’s paratheatrical projects.

Paratheatre was the Polish Laboratory Theatre’s abandonment of conventional performance<sup>15</sup> in favour of a more fundamental research: “Grotowski makes a *tabula rasa* of aesthetics ... and all ‘theatricalizing.’ He wants technical awareness to transform itself into human awareness. [...] Life itself becomes the object of his efforts” (Alexander in Osiński, 1986, p. 143). For the first two years the work took place in isolation at the ensemble’s city base in Wrocław and at a farm in a forest nearby. During this time the ensemble worked amongst themselves, admitting only a few carefully selected individuals as co-workers. Later, whilst still performing variations of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, Grotowski and his troupe began to host a series of ‘special projects’ in which there were only actors, or doers, and no spectators. In his theatrical work phase Grotowski had been interested in the spectator as a spiritual seeker, who really wished, “through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself” and “whose unrest is not

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<sup>15</sup> The ensemble staged one more production *Thanatos Polski* (Polish Lament, 1981) under the direction of Ryszard Ciésłak before it was officially dissolved in 1984.

general but directed towards a search for the truth about himself and his mission in life" (1991, p. 40). Now, performances of Apocalypsis were used as recruiting ground, compelling intrigued and sufficiently 'ready' spectators to join the paratheatrical projects. Later still, the projects were widened and opened to people from all walks of life, including journalists, educators, psychiatrists. Lasting from anywhere between a few days and several months the projects were meetings in private, natural settings in Poland, the United States, France, Italy and Australia.

The meetings were characterised by a continuous work on one's self, and by the desire to meet directly, without masks and false pretensions, to reveal a state of vulnerability and to release in each person a flow of energy which could lead to more authentic expression and presence. Somewhat dismissively, Innes (1993) asserts that the projects had the sole aim of rediscovering the primitive roots of humanity and that they much corresponded to the tribal 'rites of passage' investigated by anthropologists, such as Arnold Van Gennep:

"In one, a large group of [...] people were gathered in a dark confined space, lit only by a charcoal brazier and flambeaux carried by the actors. Here they participated in group improvisations, or exposed themselves to basic tactile experiences, while an extempore musical accompaniment on guitar and primitive reed flute responded to the moods of the movement and unified them" (pp. 164 - 165).

Another project involved...

"an initiation by ordeal, isolating individuals, depriving them of light and requiring them to run barefoot through the woods. This direct contact with the environment, emphasising the senses of touch and smell atrophied in modern civilization (which participants felt liberated them from 'mental habits' and returned them to the state of 'a wild animal'), led to a 'baptism' in a stream. After that, the sound of tom-toms guided individuals to a fire, around which they danced as a group for the rest of the night" (ibid).

Grotowski himself described the underlying themes of paratheatre in *Holiday*<sup>16</sup> (text fragments, published in Schechner & Wolford, 1997, pp. 215 - 225). Referring to Stanislavski, he regarded paratheatre as an opportunity to transcend the actor's dilemma between "the purpose of his work (what it will give the spectator), and what the character he creates is doing and thinking" (ibid, p. 218). For Grotowski the question was "do you want to hide, or to reveal yourself? There is a word which, in many languages, has a double meaning: the word *discover/uncover*. To discover oneself means to find oneself, and at the same time uncover

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<sup>16</sup> In Polish the word 'holiday' - swieto - does not refer to a vacation or day free from work. Instead it relates directly to the word 'sacrum' or 'holy'. This is what Grotowski referred to when he spoke or wrote about Holiday - the day that is holy.

what has been covered: to unveil" (ibid, pp. 218 - 219). Grotowski asserts that such self-discovery, such investigation of the human condition and what is most essential in life could only be rooted in the 'I-Thou' of direct communion with others, with nature, earth, forests, grass, sun, river.

"In the fear which is connected with the lack of meaning, we give up living and begin diligently to die. Routine takes the place of life, and the senses - resigned - get accustomed to nullity. [...] This shell, this sheath under which we fossilize, becomes our very existence - we set and become hardened [...] And what remains, what lives? [...] Life in falsehood, pulling wool over people's eyes, pretending: how long can one go on? To give up "what I can expect"; to come down to earth and to give one's hand - it is not a clean hand, it does not matter, what matters is the warmth of the body. To take off one's clothes and spectacles and to dip into the source" (ibid, pp. 217 - 218).

By 1974 a number of specialised programmes had come into being which were led by individuals from Grotowski's company: Acting Therapy (by Zygmunt Molik and Antoni Jaholkowski) which aimed to help the participants "rid themselves of not only voice blockages but also body, respiratory and energy blockages" (Kolankiewicz, 1978, p. 18); Meditations Aloud (by Ludwik Flaszen) in which participants explored "the purifying fire of silence, look and contact" (ibid, p. 19); Special Project (by Ryszard Ciésłak and a number of collaborators) in which participants explored simple acts of life as a means to de-habitualise and sensitise themselves. *On the Road to Active Culture*, a booklet assembled by Leszek Kolankiewicz in 1978, offers the most comprehensive account of paratheatre; the following extracts, all first-person accounts (some descriptive, some reflective) may illustrate further the nature of the work undertaken:

"We were walking faster and faster, until we began to run. We rushed onto the meadow, the human chain broke and dispersed. The torches disappeared somewhere. It was night [...] I heard shouts around me. And I shouted myself. [...] HE responded. I fell, once again, got up and - this time without stumbling - I threw myself to the ground, for the sheer pleasure of it. I found HIM, or HE found me. We rolled about, seemingly having forgotten we were not children any more. [...] Out of breath, I grew still, feeling breathing around me. And then, for the first time that night, I saw the starry sky above me, at first rocking with my fatigue, then more and more still. Someone hummed a song. No, we all did. It was a song without a tune and without words..." (Tadeusz Burzyński, commenting on Special Project with Ryszard Ciésłak, in Kolankiewicz, 1978, p. 29)

"Para-theatrical meetings bring them to feel their muscles ache from the effort, to feel their bodies, like an athlete feels at the end of a match. There is in it a joy of physical fulfilment and a joy of fatigue. [...] It is accompanied by a poetically uttered outlook on life [...] Para-theatrical meetings bring the participants to the state of spiritual exultation, ecstasy, trance, and active participation in the rites



of a religion created by them here and now..." (Malgorzata Dzieduszycka, commenting on a 'beehive' conducted by André Gregory, *ibid*, p. 61).

Not all of the accounts by participants were wholly positive. Some recounted their struggles to overcome self-consciousness, embarrassment and shame in the face of activities which could easily be regarded childish, regressive, animalistic. Angieszka Bzowska recounts,

"In spite of the appearances of a community and communicative gestures, every participant of the 'beehive' was alone, ill at ease, and desperately expressing feelings which in a normal situation he would have to control. I did not know until the end how to shut the inner cold eye and at that moment when its sober gaze had been dimmed, I felt something like panic caused by total helplessness" (*ibid*, p. 59).

Journalist and theatre critic Margaret Croyden also acknowledged the criticisms of some whilst highlighting the evocative powers of the experiences offered:

"All the activity was simple, sometimes even childlike and primitive. Yet this simplicity with its intensely poetic texture and its evocative powers, combined with the moods and interactions of the group, elicited a deeply personal response in the individual members. Not only was the human life cycle visually enacted and deeply felt, but one's essential Self was somehow miraculously exposed. For some, the experience was tantamount to participating in a Passion play that culminated in epiphany; for others it was a dramatic poem that awakened one from a sleep-in-life; for still others, a bitter dirge for a paradise lost and never to be regained; and for a few who couldn't bear the whole thing, a 'Wagnerian kindergarten' (*ibid*, p. 67).

The Polish psychologist and psychiatrist Kazimierz Dąbrowski who participated in paratheatrical activities regarded them as 'developmental mysteries', in which 'intellectual' as well as 'irrational' and 'animistic' forces revealed themselves. These, Dąbrowski asserted, made it easier for participants to de-habitualise their behaviour and to become more open and receptive in their attitude:

"On the one hand, I observed clear intelligible dynamisms, on the other those we could describe as dark, not prone to rational analysis, magic as it were but, because of that, and thanks to the elements of animism, the element of mystery appeared. [...] It seems that individual personality was sublimated and higher aims appeared. On the other hand, social points of junction were broadened and deepened. [...] 'Beehives' make it easier to become released from routine actions, to break harmful stereotypes. One perceives other values. One sees comprehensively." (*ibid*, p. 48).

Critics of paratheatre, however, regarded the activities provided as escapist and pseudo-religious, positioning Grotowski as a new prophet who was 'cashing in' on the fame and respect of the Polish Laboratory Theatre:

"From verifiable activity in the general framework of 'theatre' form, he escapes into a totally arbitrary sphere of personal contacts, meetings, conversations, common actions. [...] Grotowski's artistic philosophy, or his philosophy of life, contains only half-truths, requiring special, peculiar conditions, available to only some people [...] because in the model of society that Grotowski, and all of us, happen to live, their practical application is a sumptuous luxury, and so their propagation looks like a wilful game" (Maciej Karpinski, *ibid.*, pp. 91 - 92).

Despite the criticisms levelled at Grotowski, his paratheatrical work steadily developed, first involving a few people, then hundreds, then thousands. Paratheatre culminated in the 'University of Research' of the Theatre of Nations in June and July 1974 in Wroclaw, in which 4500 people participated - many of them leading figures in the world of Western theatre and dance. "For three weeks, Grotowski's laboratory became the Mecca of the theatre world and the nature and meaning of the art form was analyzed, questioned, and dreamed" (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007, p. 37). "The premise was 'to seek a basic ground of understanding between people ... a new form of encounter with mankind,' and for theatre professionals 'to seek a new vital base for practicing one's profession'" (*ibid.*, p. 36).

Paratheatre still continues today through the practice of a few performance artists and collectives around the world. Among them are Peter Rose in Germany, Katharina Seyferth in France, Antero Alli and Matt Mitler in the US, as well as one of Grotowski's main female collaborators during his theatrical and paratheatrical experiments: Rena Mirecka who in 1993 co-founded the International Centre of Work 'Prema Sayi' in Italy.

As his paratheatrical research developed, Grotowski travelled extensively and he began to shift emphasis from open meetings to longer-term encounters which attempted "to uncover what was abiding, archetypal, old: the 'sources' of performativity" (Schechner, 1997b, p. 212). He had reached the limits of paratheatre - its essentially short participatory workshops emulating ritual to initiate an Active Culture<sup>17</sup> in the West could not lead him further along the path. As Schechner (1999) affirms, for Grotowski paratheatre was ultimately "too chaotic, scattered, undisciplined, and indulgent" (p. 6). The level of proficiency and the necessary length of engagement was lacking; and Grotowski desired to involve himself more deeply in

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<sup>17</sup> The term Active Culture can be paired with Paratheatre. "Active Culture, Grotowski says, is commonly called creativity. It is action 'which gives a sense of fulfilment of life...' [...] To put it simply: Paratheatre/ Active Culture seeks to extend the privilege of creative action to those not usually involved in theatre production" (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007, pp. 33/ 34).

research of 'source techniques,' ultimately to find and engage with actions and doings which preceded all differences of tradition, culture and religion. Grotowski wanted to grasp "the roots of humanity itself: the true origin" (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007, p. 40), thus he moved toward a *Theatre of Sources*.

### **Theatre of Sources (1976 - 1982)**

In the final stages of paratheatre Grotowski began to invite traditional artists from all around the world - voodoo practitioners from Haiti, Noh performers from Japan, Bauls from West Bengal - to work with him in Poland, to explore "what they had in common, the bedrock of performance, revealing and refining the techniques of being that lie beneath individuality. Breathing, basic movements, observation ... and silence" (ibid). This transcultural group of practitioners (which over time varied in size and composition) would not teach one another their techniques but rather strive to discover "actions which 'precede the differences'" (from text fragments based on Grotowski's explanations of Theatre of Sources, published in Schechner & Wolford, 1997, p. 265), arriving at common, primary points of departure. Periodically the group would also invite co-workers from the outside, to confront them with the actions they had discovered, to test and to see what would prove efficacious for the non-practitioner.

Grotowski led several expeditions to study ritual techniques during this time which took him and his team to Haiti, Nigeria, Mexico and India (see Różycki, 1992). Buski aptly describes the overriding questions which motivated the artists in their shared research:

"What is the creative in man in the face of the living presence of others, in a mutual communion? How is it possible - while respecting differences between people - to achieve human understanding above the differences of race, culture, tradition, upbringing, language? In what conditions is it possible to achieve interhuman fullness?" (in Burzynski and Osiński, 1979, p. 109)

Grotowski regarded the work as concerned with a temporary suspension of the habitual patterns of the adult body-mind and a return to the 'state of the child', to "something tangible, organic, primal" (from text fragments based on Grotowski's explanations of Theatre of Sources, published in Schechner & Wolford, 1997, p. 260). It is not a regression to a pre-rational state as Innes (1993) suggested for paratheatre, or a playing at being children - but an un-taming of body and mind, leading to a deconditioning of perception. Grotowski elaborates that a close relationship with nature aids this process of deconditioning, because it moves us "towards what is sourcial" (from text fragments based on Grotowski's explanations of Theatre of Sources, published in Schechner & Wolford, 1997, p. 253). Theatre of Sources unfolded in

close contact with nature, sometimes within the group, sometimes in solitude. The landscape became the gateway to the work and the medium of the work.

Whilst on expedition in India, the group involved themselves in a deep investigation of the songs and performative actions of the Baul. They learned in silence and by imitation, following the postures, movements, breathing patterns and utterings of the Baul. The work required the group to focus their attention on the pulsations and rhythms unfolding in their bodies whilst maintaining a stillness of the mind. The physical practice was the path to inner liberation. Grotowski (1990) later described it as a state of 'I-I':

"I-I does not mean to be cut in two but to be double. The question is to be passive in action and active in seeing (reversing the habit). Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present. To nourish the life of the I-I, *Performer* must develop not an organism-mass, an organism of muscles, athletic, but an organism-channel through which the energies circulate, the energies transform, the subtle is touched" (p. 378).

Central to Theatre of Sources was the development of the *Motions*, a movement sequence reminiscent of Gurdjieff's *Movements*, as well as of the *Surya Namaskar*<sup>18</sup>. In relation to Gurdjieff Schechner (1997c) has asserted, "Gurdjieff's desire to produce his own 'objective art' led him to synthesise what he called The Movements from different sources. [...] In *Motions*, as in *Movements*, the physical details are very precisely codified, repeated in exactly the same way. [...] The similarities can be explained in two ways. Either Grotowski took something from Gurdjieff or both Gs drew from the same sources" (p. 479). Or, irrespective of sources, such approaches are, indeed, 'objective', and therefore parallel traditions can come to similar conclusions. We shall take a closer look at the *Motions* when exploring Grotowski's *Objective Drama* project.

Evolved versions of Grotowski's Theatre of Sources are still pursued today by a number of individuals, among them the Indian theatre director Abani Biswas who worked with Grotowski during Theatre of Sources and whose work I encountered briefly in 2008. When Theatre of Sources came to a halt in 1983 Biswas decided to return to India and continue in the same vein alone. He worked on the outskirts of Calcutta, then travelled in Bihar, Orissa and Kerala, slowly gathering a group of traditional Indian artists around him. In 1986 Biswas launched Milón Méla, now an ensemble of around 20 traditional artists: Baul musicians from Bengal, Chhau dancers from Bihar, Kalarippayattu masters from Kerala, Gotipua dancers from Orissa and Fakirs and Patuas from Bengal. The ensemble is based in a work centre near Santiniketan in West Bengal and each year tours extensively through Europe, sharing its work through

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<sup>18</sup> Surya Namaskar (sūrya namaskāra, Sanskrit, 'salute to the sun') is a dynamic sequence of Hatha Yoga poses and movements.

performances and parades, as well as through more intimate work encounters with European theatre and dance practitioners.

One such encounter, organised by the British theatre company *Organic Theatre*, took place from 25<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008 in Bristol. During this time 12 European performance artists, including myself, participated in a three-day workshop, receiving basic instruction in Kalarippayattu, Chhau and Gotipua. The workshops commenced with Baul songs which the ensemble traditionally sings at dawn when they are in India. Following the songs and chanting of mantras (Milón Méla, 2008a), the ensemble simultaneously presented Kalarippayattu, Gotipua and Chhau alongside Motions. Then it was the participants' turn: to observe and to follow, to practice each art in turn: movement sequences from the Southern style of Kalari, a Chhau dance, a Gotipua dance.

"The techniques are dramatic and ecological: They are dramatic because are based on 'actions', sometimes very simple, a particular way of walking, a cycle of movement; that is, it's about active techniques and not contemplative ones. They are ecological because they put the human being in front of the strength of nature and of one's own nature. The objective is not to appropriate techniques belonging to other civilisations, but to elaborate some techniques which, over and above cultural differences, might be able to de-condition us from the actual context in which we live" (Milón Méla, 2008b).

The bodily limitations of the Western performers were apparent - but the steady songs of the Baul musicians to *dhols* and *dotaras* was entrancing and I soon became absorbed in imitation: the strenuously repetitive copying of precise movements, stretches, steps, mudras, postures and jumps ... again and again. I was slowly beginning to ease into the complex rhythms of contraction and repose.

Whilst explaining the objectives of Theatre of Sources, Grotowski once commented,

"There is a very old expression which one finds in many different traditions: 'Movement which is repose.' [...] in yoga approaches in India it is said that we can be fully awake, vigilant, and also in repose: as if we were plunged into a deep sleep without confabulations. [...] When we are moving, and when we are able to break through the techniques of the body of everyday life, then our movement becomes a movement of perception" (from text fragments based on Grotowski's explanations of Theatre of Sources, published in Schechner & Wolford, 1997, p. 263).

The workshop with Milón Méla seemed to me one such opportunity to tap into 'movement which is repose' - and yet our three-day encounter was but a mere glimpse through the narrow gap of a door slightly ajar. Grotowski was very wary of cultural appropriation and in his

own work asserted that he and his collaborators were careful to witness the source techniques and partake in practice without disturbing or imposing interpretation. The issue of theatrical tourism is one which I have faced in my own research which was inevitably sporadic and limited in terms of immersion and practice. I have tried to follow Grotowski's example in his assertion that he was careful to maintain a modest and receptive approach, "careful to avoid becoming fascinated, as for example tourists could be fascinated, or pretending to get some illusionary competence; the approach is [...] based on recognition of everyone's cultural and practical boundaries" (from text fragments based on Grotowski's explanations of Theatre of Sources, published in Schechner & Wolford, 1997, p. 268). The thorough study of any system takes many years. Moreover, we learn initially by imitating but later by integrating what we have discovered into our own lives, by adapting the techniques, discerning what is relevant and crucial for our own progress. My own PhD journey has unfolded and continues to unfold much in this manner.

### **Objective Drama (1983 - 1986)**

Back in 1983, whilst Biswas was pursuing his own 'sources' research in India, Grotowski ventured to set up the *Objective Drama* project, and in 1986, *Art as Vehicle*. His Theatre of Sources project had been far from finished when his home base in Wroclaw, Poland came under threat by the government's declaration of martial law in December 1981. Grotowski left Poland in 1982, travelling first to Italy, then Haiti and finally to the United States where he requested political asylum. His colleagues dispersed into different countries and projects, and at the end of 1982 the famous Polish Laboratory Theatre ceased to exist (although it was not officially dissolved until 1984). Grotowski spent a year at Columbia University, and in 1983 he initiated the Objective Drama project at the University of California - Irvine.

During Objective Drama, Grotowski continued his earlier investigations of physical techniques and ritual elements of cultures from around the world in collaboration with traditional practitioners of predominantly Asian origin. Grotowski's ideas regarding Objective Drama can be related to T.S. Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative" (Wolford, 1997a, p. 285). Whilst Eliot was concerned with the formula (a situation, a chain of events, etc.) which could trigger a particular emotional response within a reader encountering literary work, Grotowski's investigation was primarily concerned with the effect a particular action could have on experience of the creative practitioner, and not the receiver (the spectator). In addition, Grotowski was not concerned with emotional response per se, but "rather with the subtle psychophysical impact of the performative artefact on the practitioner, englobing the entirety of his or her body/mind/being" (ibid).

In describing Objective Drama, Wolford likens Grotowski's work to Gurdjieff's pursuit of objective art. Quoting Osiński, Wolford summarises Gurdjieff's concept of objective art: "Subjective art relies on a randomness or individual view of things and phenomena, and thus it is often governed by human caprice. 'Objective art,' on the other hand, has an extra- and supra-individual quality, and it can thereby reveal the laws of fate and the destiny of man" (in Wolford, 1997a, p. 286). Wolford expands, "According to Gurdjieff, the art of traditional cultures is mathematically precise, reflecting a specific inner content. [...] [It] is not intended to appeal to subjective or aesthetic faculties; it is meant to be understood as a language that is read by those who are familiar with its syntactic codes" (ibid, p. 286).

Grotowski's Objective Drama differed from Theatre of Sources, in that the latter was concerned with "that which precedes the differences" (ibid, p. 288), whilst the former aimed to test the efficacy of the various source techniques when applied outside of their indigenous settings - not to unite and synthesise the techniques into one homogenous system, but to **trace transcultural similarities** in psychophysical effect. Whilst conducting such research Grotowski remained fully aware of the inherent dangers of "a pan-ecumenical spirit [...] which makes basic Western orientations seem identical to Oriental orientations" (Grotowski in Wolford, 1997a, p. 288). In a keynote address presented at the Congress on 'Theatre East and West' (see Brandon, 1985) held at the University of Rome in September 1984, Grotowski reaffirmed his concerns regarding cultural syncretism:

"It seems to me that the Oriental and Occidental approaches are complementary. But we must not try to create a synthesis of a 'performative' syncretism; rather we must try to transcend the limitations of the two approaches. For example, it is often said that hara is always in the stomach. Hara means stomach. But hara can sometimes be in the back, sometimes in the head, sometimes in the legs, depending on the situation. Think of combat! Hara is everywhere, which is to say nowhere. Perfect hara has no home ... If an Oriental wants to produce Occidental-style theatre, very often he will take the convention as a received form and, by keeping this form, end up with signs for action instead of actions. [...] A Westerner doing 'Oriental' theatre is either 'free' - and thus like a monkey imitating his master, making pseudo-signs without precision or usefulness, trying to find the 'forces' manifested by actor/mediums, etc. ... the affective imagination - or else he is a near-perfect Balinese, though not quite so good" (Grotowski & Schaeffer Price, 1989, pp. 8/9).

Objective Drama research was concerned with the exploration of *yantras*: fine instruments which were the outcome of long-standing practices which could help an individual to rise from dilettantism to mastery, from egoic slumber to spiritual awakening, to a totality, a fullness of being. In Sanskrit the term yantra means 'instrument of restraint' (from its root meaning "to restrain, curb") - and it can refer to geometrical patterns or objects, also mechanical devices or implements, such as an astronomer's observational device. "In ancient India, temples were

built as yantras - that is, as instruments of transformation or of energetic passage from stimulation to tranquillity, to 'peace.' [...] And this is precisely what Grotowski is aiming for [...] in the field of performing arts: genuine mastery, supreme competence" (Osiński, 1997, pp. 387/388).

Grotowski investigated primal postures, movements, physical actions, dances and songs which, as he put it, could awaken the 'reptile body'. Such explorations are, of course, reminiscent of Tantra Yoga and Grotowski was fully aware of it: "...according to Hindu tradition derived from Tantra, you have a serpent asleep at the base of the spinal column" (Grotowski, 1989/1997, p. 297). The director was concerned with the distillation of techniques which could facilitate the serpent's awakening within the performer. The work was rigorous, physically arduous and executed with tremendous concentration and precision. There was silence in the workspace, most of the exercises were communicated non-verbally. Learning unfolded through observation, imitation and repetition. I Wayan Lendra, a Balinese performer who participated in Grotowski's Objective Drama research, affirms that the yantras explored had a single, important purpose:

"...the awakening of innate physical power. This physical power, which the Hindu tradition refers to as the 'sleeping energy' (*kundalini*) lies at the bottom of the spine. [...] Grotowski described what I call innate physical power as the 'reptile brain,' the spinal cord and brain stem, with the 'sleeping energy' at the very bottom of the spine. Grotowski wanted to investigate and find a way to wake up this energy centre which, when awakened, can increase our awareness, sensitivity, and perception" (Lendra, 1997, pp. 326/327).

One exercise which Lendra encountered and practiced in depth was the Motions, as developed during Theatre of Sources. Lendra describes the exercise as one for physical, as well as for mental training. "The primary purpose of this exercise is to train the body to be sensitive and the mind to be alert. The Motions, executed in standing position, is a complex exercise, meditative in quality, slowly performed and physically strenuous. It was usually practiced outdoors on the hillside, in silence, and during transitional times, especially at sunset and at sunrise" (ibid, p. 324). The exercise which was practiced in a group originally took around ninety minutes and was later on shortened to forty-five minutes. It involved three major movements which were repeated towards each of the four cardinal directions. The movements were intersected by a slow turning to reach the cardinal points. One essential requirement during the Motions was that "the eyes should see in a wide angle and the ears should hear all sounds at once. [...] If thoughts come we must not react to the thoughts or continue to develop them, but instead simply observe them and let them pass by in the same way we observe what we see and hear" (ibid, p. 325).



Objective Drama also featured rigorous vocal training in which the participants worked with traditional songs from various cultures, among them Creole songs taught by the Haitian ritualist Maud Robart. Wolford (1997b) regards Robart's songs as some of the most effective yantras of the Objective Drama programme, "capable of producing a profound inner effect on the participant" (p. 332). Working on songs required the participants to pay attention to tempo and melody, as well as learning the appropriate use of resonators in the body. Songs were learned only under direct supervision of Robart, and by listening and repetition - no audio recordings or transcripts were allowed. This was because the participants essentially had to discover the innate vibratory pattern of each song which could not be captured by musical notation or recording. Grotowski's research of yantras, particularly of ancient songs which traditionally served ritual purposes, finally led him into his last work phase: *Art as Vehicle*.

### **Art as Vehicle (1986 - current)**

Art as Vehicle was born in 1986 with the establishment of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera, Italy. Grotowski worked here until his death in 1999; he dedicated the last years of his life to the refinement of performative pathways - ancient songs and texts, movements and physical scores of actions - which could aid the process of energy transformation within the individual. His main collaborator became Thomas Richards whom he had met in 1984 during his Objective Drama research and who now heads the centre and continues its research. Between 1986 and 1993 the activities pursued by the Workcenter included the development of performance structures around songs from African and Afro-Caribbean lines of tradition, led by Thomas Richards, as well as the refinement of Motions. Another group, led by Maud Robart continued the work with Haitian songs, as well as texts from Egyptian and Middle Eastern cultures.

The approach of the Workcenter is not easy to describe without resort to language which may sound flaky, pseudo-spiritual. On the basis of my own brief contacts with the Workcenter in 2005 and 2007 I can assert that the work pursued - in seclusion, silence, and solitude - is tremendously rigorous and technically precise. I observed that through its non-mimetic, non-representational nature this work touches something profound within the practitioner and renders him into state of grace. Public performance is not the aim of Art as Vehicle, indeed, Grotowski placed it on the opposite end of the theatrical spectrum - and yet the performers who have confronted themselves through Art as Vehicle are by far the best actors I have ever experienced.

Thomas Richards has come to describe Art as Vehicle as a process of energy transformation which he refers to as 'inner action'. By means of work with personal memories and associations, the practitioner constructs and refines a montage of actions which are not concerned with what a spectator might perceive, but which instead focus on the practitioner's inner process, his inner journey along the river of actions and impulses. This inner journey is a transformation of 'coarse', 'heavy', 'vital' energies to more subtle energies. It is also a ripening of inner essence, a personal transmutation toward the *body-of-essence*. Grotowski likens the trajectory of Art as Vehicle to the path of a warrior whose body becomes non-resistant, open, transparent. "The key question is: What is your process? Are you faithful to it or do you fight against your process? [...] What is the quality of submission to your own destiny?" (Grotowski, 1990/1997, p. 377).

A longer quote from Richards captures something of the nature of 'inner action':

"The doer begins to sing. The melody is precise. The rhythm is precise. The doer begins to let the song descend into the organism, and the sonic vibration begins to change. The syllables and the melody of these songs begin to touch and activate something I perceive to be like energy seats in the organism. An energy seat seems to me to be something like a center of energy inside the organism. These centers can become activated. In my perception, one energy center exists around what's called the solar plexus, around the area of the stomach. It relates to vitality, as if the life force is seated there. In some moment it's as if this begins to open, and is receiving through the stream of life impulses in the body related to the songs - the melody is precise, the rhythm is precise, but it's like some force is collecting in the plexus. And then through this place, this very strong energy which is collecting can find its way, as if entering a channel in the organism, toward a seat slightly above it, for me related to what in my intimate world is 'heart.' Here, what is in the vital pool begins to flow upward into this other resource and transform itself into a quality of energy which is more subtle. When I say subtle I mean more light, more luminous. [...] From this pool related, let's say, to the 'heart,' something becomes open which is permitting some passage upward, and it's as if there begins to be touched a level of energy around the head, in front of the head, behind it. I don't mean this to be a general formula which should be the same for everyone. But in someone's perception it can be all connected, like a river which is flowing from the vitality to this very subtle energy someone might perceive as being behind the head and above, even above, touching something that is no longer just related to the physical frame, but is as if above the physical frame. As if some source, when touched, begins to be activated, and something like a very subtle rain is descending and washing every cell of the body. This journey from one quality of energy, dense and vital, up and up toward a very subtle quality of energy, and then that subtle something descending back into the basic physicality ... It's as if these songs were made or discovered hundreds or thousands of years ago for waking up some kind of energy (or energies) in the human being and for dealing with it" (Richards, 2008, pp.7/ 8).

In an interview with Wolford, Richards explained that Grotowski likened Art as Vehicle to the tradition of Bauls in Bengal. "He said that some time ago [...] there was a tradition in India of singers/ performers. And these singers/ performers had songs which they were singing that were very old or linked to a very old tradition. With these songs, they made a work on themselves related to something 'inner'" (Richards, 1997, p. 447) - to the end that there would be an inner ripening.

Reflecting upon the approach of the Workcenter, Schechner (1997c) affirms,

"Each person, if properly trained, can experience the identity of atman and Brahman. When trained, touched, found, liberated, experienced (which is the right word? No word is right), all boundaries between the individual and the ultimate evaporate. [...] At the intersection of the most intimate-personal with the most objective-archetypal, Grotowski's does construct actions which are presumed to be the distilled essence of what is abiding, ancient, and true, in human life. Warning against 'self-indulgence', as he has done throughout his career, Grotowski caustically denies that people can find the essential without undergoing the most rigorous and committed training. The atman is not easily or casually accessed. What is essential can be researched only by means of a disciplined process joining what is learned from those who know to what is found inside the individual self. This self, as I have noted, is the Hindu atman - Brahman impersonal Self, not the ego-driven narcissistic self of daily life" (pp. 467/ 468).

Grotowski himself avoided such spiritual discourse in his meetings with groups who came to witness Art as Vehicle. Similarly, when working Richards sticks to terminology concerned with the performer's craft, particularly when training new members of the group. 'Inner action' is not something one can teach, Richards asserts. Instead teaching ought to focus on the mastery of the actor's craft, for "we have no channel for our creative force without technique" (Richards, 1995, p. 7). Richards expands that in their enthusiasm for Grotowski's metaphysical ideas many actors and theatre groups forget that Grotowski was above all a master theatre director who was rooted in the craft of theatre.

Jerzy Grotowski died on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1999 in Pontedera, Italy. Art as Vehicle continues to evolve today under Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini who I encountered during my research. However, Grotowski's artistic influence has spread much wider than Pontedera. He has ignited flames around the world, in individuals, groups, theatre companies who are continuing their own research: The New World Performance Laboratory (NWPL) under the artistic direction of James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta in Ohio; Denmark based company Odin Teatret under the lead of Eugenio Barba whose work is a part of my research; London based theatre company Para Active founded by Jonathan Grieve and Persis-Jade Maravala; Wrocław based Theatre ZAR under Jarosław Fret - to name a few.

## **Unus Mundus: The Psychosomatics of Transformation**

We have explored the work of therapists who use drama as a vehicle for self-exploration and healing. We have discussed the approaches of theatre practitioners who regard their practices as a path toward authentic performance, and more so towards inner liberation and higher states of consciousness. We have noted that these practitioners strive for transformation, rather than transportation in their work (Schechner), and that they speak of trance, of possession, and of non-dual states of consciousness in the performer (e.g. translumination, Grotowski) - a state in which the mind-body split is transcended and the actor's soul 'shines through the flesh'.

At the root of all these approaches we find the deep-seated belief that psyche and body spring forth from one source. As Jung puts it, "Mind and body are the expression of a single entity ... This living being appears outwardly as the material body, but inwardly as a series of images of the vital activities taking place within it" (in Edinger, 1995, p.19). Writing about Stanislavski's work, Merlin (2001) asserts, "there's no divide between body and psychology, but rather a continuum" (p. 27). She quotes Michael Chekov who described the actor's work as "transforming the outer thing [e.g. a play script, JB] into the inner life, and changing the inner life into the outer event" (in Merlin, 2001, p. 28). We can draw parallels to Grotowski's and Richards' work on Art as Vehicle in which 'inner action' always unfolds in correspondence with an outer score of action. Merlin crucially notes that the actor's psycho-physical work requires a high degree of sensitivity, a becoming restfully attentive to the transient moment, so that the performance is grounded in the impulses of the present rather than in past patterns of behaviour established during rehearsal. Highlighting the subtlety of the psycho-physical dynamic she expands that a fine-tuning of the body and its expressive capabilities will help the actor to "fine-tune other parts of [the] psycho-physical mechanism (imagination, emotion, will)" (p. 29). We can say then that the actor's 'work on the self' entails the refinement of his capacity for inner sensitivity and for expression. The constituents and tools of the refinement process depend on the system applied. Malekin and Yarrow (1997) highlight that "central to virtually all this work [...] is an awareness of the importance of that pivotal state of the 'neutral body' and of the way it serves as the starting point for the deployment of the actor's resources, both mental and physical" (p. 134).

We have further seen that many theatre practitioners have drawn selectively from meditative and martial arts practices, as well as from the highly codified performance traditions which we find in Asia. Grotowski first explored traditional practices in their indigenous settings, then endeavoured to trace the practices' transcultural similarities in terms of their psychophysical effect - in an attempt to arrive at the very roots of theatre. As we will see later, Barba continued Grotowski's transcultural work and rooted 'his' refinement process of the actor in

the exploration of the pre-expressive dimensions of the human being in performance contexts.

In contrast to the work of professional theatre artists, we can say that in therapeutic approaches the focus rests neither primarily on the refinement of expressive capacities, nor does it rest on the development of precise and repeatable scores of actions. Rather therapist and patient strive towards the deepening and fine-tuning of the patient's inner awareness, furthering the process of psychosomatic liberation and expression - both of which aid integration of previously suppressed material.

We need then to take a closer look at the psychosomatics of transformation which are at the core of the actor's, the doer's and the patient's work on the self. The dynamics involved are lucidly articulated in the writings of somatic therapists and dance/ movement therapists who bear witness to the manifestation of unconscious material in their clients' embodied play. As the founder of Authentic Movement, dance therapist Mary Starks Whitehouse (2005a) asserts,

"The body is the physical aspect of the personality and movement is the personality made visible. The distortions, tensions and restrictions are the distortions, tensions and restrictions within the personality. They are, at any given moment, the condition of the psyche. And the discovery of their factual existence, their physical existence, is the beginning of the process of what might be called psychosomatic recognition" (p. 52).

I specifically mentioned Authentic Movement in relation to Artaud, which invites self-directed movement through which the mover taps into and gives expression to physical impulses. The work with impulses was also at the heart of Stanislavski's later work and more so Grotowski's approach. Grotowski recognized that before any physical action there was a subtle impulse invisible to the naked eye. Grotowski regarded the impulse to be "something that pushes from 'inside' the body and extends itself out toward the periphery; something very subtle, born 'inside the body,' and which does not come from uniquely a corporeal domain" (Grotowski in Richards, 1995, p. 95). Jungian psychologist Arnold Mindell (1998) elucidates that in Taoist alchemy human vitality was "understood as spontaneous impulses" and that "[B]y observing and becoming aware of unconscious instinctive actions, the alchemist purified his nature and realized Mercury<sup>19</sup>, the spirit, which 'leads to the realization of the essential nature'" (pp. 100 - 101). Mindell contends that Mercury is "the god of the body", as well as "the god of the unconscious" (ibid, p. 99), asserting a direct link between the unconscious domains of the

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<sup>19</sup> Mercury is sometimes equated with alchemy's *prima materia*, or basic substance, which the alchemist sought to refine until it turned into "the great medicine, the pill for immortality, or the finest metal" (Mindell, 1998, p. 99).

psyche and the body. Similarly, Jung (1989) suggests that “When the alchemist speaks of Mercurius, on the face of it he means quicksilver, but inwardly he means the world-creating spirit concealed or imprisoned in matter” (pp. 292 - 293). Jung and Mindell are certainly not alone in their belief that the unconscious may have a material aspect which is reflected in the body. Already Freud and his contemporaries recognised that there seemed to be a deep connection between mind and matter - however to this day the nature of this connection is hardly understood. The intersection between the psychological and the physical was at the heart of a fruitful exchange of ideas between Jung and the Nobel physicist Wolfgang Pauli (see Meier, 2001). For both Jung and Pauli “the interactive relationship between psyche and matter was an empirical reality (as well as a numinous source of uncanny meaning)” (Lindorff, 1995, p. 572). A lifelong friendship developed through which Jungian insights entered the discourse of modern physics, and conversely ideas pertaining to microphysics shaped psychological language and theory.

Jung and Pauli found an epistemological foundation in medieval alchemy “which assumed an all encompassing unity in nature” (ibid, p. 573): *Unus Mundus* (Latin, ‘one world’) - a term first used by the alchemist Gerardus Dorneus. The energetic principle of the *Unus Mundus* was the *Anima Mundi* (Latin, ‘world soul’), which according to classical philosophy was thought to animate all matter in the way the human soul animated the body. In their strive to shed light on the concept of a unified psychophysical reality, Jung and Pauli examined a broad area of shared interest, including ideas explored in quantum mechanics, such as *complementarity*, and the phenomenon of *synchronicity* - a term Jung had coined to account for the occurrence of non-causal, meaningful coincidences.

Complementarity, as discovered by physicist Niels Bohr, refers to the principle that subatomic particles manifest either wave-like properties or particle-like properties, depending on the conditions of the observation, and that these particles exist in some form of potentiality, or *superposition*, until they are observed. It is important to highlight that in the state of potentiality the subatomic particle is not in any way less real than in its manifest state. Rather, it is, as the term superposition indicates, *both particle and wave* at the same time and it is described in terms of the probability of becoming one or the other.

Quantum mechanics invokes a reality at the subatomic level which is quite unlike the reality we recognise from our everyday experience. Quantum theory blurs “the distinction between subject and object, cause and effect, it introduces a strong holistic element into our worldview” (Davies in Lancaster, 1991, p. 12). As such, it can account for phenomena which contradict our everyday experience, one being that “two entities, such as electrons, which initially combine to form a molecule and then separate, show a peculiar non-local relationship, which can at best be described as a non-causal connection of elements that are

far apart" (in Lancaster, 1991, p. 13). Quantum theory may account for the occurrence of synchronicity.

What is highly significant in this context is that at its most profound depth, psychology appears to mirror the reality described by quantum mechanics. In the realm of the psyche we find a phenomenon, which seems analogous to superposition, and this is the multiplicity of meaning. As Lancaster (2004) asserts, "there is indeed good evidence for such *multiplicity in preconscious processing*. Consciousness demands the *either ... or* state; preconsciousness may embrace the multiplicity in the *both ... and* state" (p. 118). Complementarity relies on the involvement of a third entity which triggers the collapse from potentiality into actuality, and that is the observer. In my Masters thesis (Bockler, 2004) I suggested that the act of observation is essentially creative, that is generative. In other words, as we observe we cause the creation of that which we perceive. The idea of a creative observer who collapses multiplicity into actuality finds further resonance in depth psychology, as well as in the cognitive neurosciences. It has long been suggested that our ordinary sense of self, our 'I', is a construct, recreated from moment to moment in the mind. As Lancaster (2004) asserts,

"The mind rushes into an inference, a *meaningful interpretation* to explain the data of the senses. And 'I' may be understood within this context: it is the mind's most successful manoeuvre for increasing the sense of meaning. [...] The mind synthesizes a narrative that fits the available information into a story that is structured around a logic of causation. And central to the mind's narratives is the 'center of narrative gravity' itself, namely 'I'" (p. 164).

Such thinking is also in accord with Buddhist teachings which emphasise that 'I' lacks substance and continuity. According to depth psychology then, in our persistent desire for meaning we continuously collapse unconscious, ambiguous sensory data into distinct, conscious perceptions of the world which are coherent with our memories and beliefs, and our sense of 'I' arises as part of, and is unaware of this process. There is a seeming contradiction here which requires some further explanation. I say that 'we' collapse ambiguity into actuality whilst emphasising that our 'I' is not in charge of this process. Who then is this mysterious, creating observer, if not 'I'? - It is the concealed and ineffable twin of the 'I', the 'Other' within us of whom we cannot really speak. Grotstein (2008) refers to this concealed one as the "ineffable subject of the unconscious" (p. xv), "the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream as well as the Dreamer Who Understands the Dream" (p. xxvii), of whom our ordinary 'I' only catches glimpses. In Jung's topology of the psyche I may compare Grotstein's ineffable subject with the 'Self' (capital 'S', whilst the 'I' is identified with the 'self', small 's'), the central archetype which unifies and balances our psyche and drives us to realise our innermost essence. Grotstein believes that it is the central task of psychoanalysis not merely to attain deeper self-insight but to reunite the 'I' with the ineffable: "to attain transcendence over

oneself, over one's masks and disguises, to rebecome one's supraordinate subject. This task involves a transcendent reunion with one's ineffable subject in a moment of *aletheia* (unconcealment)" (p. xxvii).<sup>20</sup>

To return to dance/movement therapies then, the first step is to attune the ordinary 'I', to become aware and attentive to one's body, to let the movement happen of its own accord - so that we may begin to hear the ineffable other who sits at the spring of our mind and whose whispers echo through the cells of our body. In Authentic Movement the patient is encouraged to relinquish conscious control of his actions and to listen inwardly, to allow movement to emerge. As Starks Whitehouse asserts, this process of letting go "does not mean what is usually called relaxation, a kind of collapsing, throwing away the energy to become limp, heavy, lethargic. It does mean mobilizing attention so that the energy can express itself" (2005b, p. 89). Starks Whitehouse refers to the Taoist principle of "Non-action in action; action in non-action" (2005a, p. 53) - a principle which we found played an important role in Grotowski's work. We can also find it in the work of Jung who inspired Starks Whitehouse. Jung regarded the suspension of our rational, critical 'I' as the crucial ingredient to deep self-engagement. "The art of letting things happen, action through non-action, letting go of oneself as taught by Meister Eckhart, became for me the key that opens the door to the way" (Jung, 1995, GW 13, par. 20). Starks Whitehouse expands that such 'letting go' requires inner openness, honesty, concentration and patience. If the egoic self of the mover is able to follow - not to initiate but to follow his impulses - then new capacities appear, new modes of behaviour are possible.

Moreover, in a heightened state of inner awareness, the mover will perceive the origins of impulses as sensations in specific locations of the body. The American psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin (e.g. 1978) referred to such internal bodily perception as 'felt sense' which he suggested could be harnessed in psychotherapy. Gendlin found that by paying attention to a felt sense (through a process which Gendlin called 'focusing') clients could bring a vague sensation into focus, allowing it to unfold and shift into movement and expression, literally

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<sup>20</sup> Depth Psychology's drive for ultimate revelation puts it at odds with mystical traditions which "envisage a more dynamic interplay between concealing and revealing. For example, when the Zohar states that 'Everything is concealed and revealed' (2:230b), it has in mind an ongoing two-way dynamic. Revelation of secrets can only occur in a manner that results in their re-concealment. Paradox is the path to enlightenment" (Lancaster, 2004, pp. 229 - 230). Lancaster quotes Katz who notes a similar approach in the work of Christian mystic Meister Eckhart (who greatly influenced Grotowski). Lancaster asserts that the path of the mystic cannot lead beyond the veil. "There is no emerging into full light, as if the covering could be totally thrown off. Rather, the mystical goal is one of consciously engaging with the inner working of creation, where the concealing-revealing-concealing dynamic operates" (ibid, p. 231). This, I believe, is another important area where theatre practitioners like Grotowski differ from theatre therapists. Grotowski was a mystic at heart and not a psychoanalyst.



enabling them to 'become unstuck'. The phrase 'becoming unstuck' is particularly apt, considering that many of our bodily sensations relate to restrictions and tensions within the bodymind. The Austrian-American psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich who worked with Freud in the 1920s suggested that over our lifetime we build up our own unique 'body armour' or 'character armour' through a continuous blocking and repression of inner sensations and impulses, resulting in chronic muscle tensions and rigidity in body and mind (e.g. Raknes, 2004). Reich who is today regarded as the founder of somatic psychology was among the first to explore the dynamics between body and psyche, proposing that "the entire history of the person was contained within the physical structure and organismic functioning" (Halprin, 2003, p. 56). Reich developed character-analytic vegetotherapy, a psychotherapy which besides psychoanalysis focused on the release of a patient's chronic tensions by calling attention to them and by direct physical manipulation. Reich found that his physical approach to his patients not only brought to light repressed memories and emotions but that many patients reported feeling streamings of energy in the body which they had never previously experienced. "Such streamings were pleasurable, usually soft and rather weak but occasionally so strong that the person felt that they overflowed him" (Raknes, 2004, p. 21). Reich came to call them vegetative streamings because they appeared to originate from the autonomous nervous system.<sup>21</sup> Reich further noted that these streamings appeared only after a considerable loosening of the spasms and tensions within a patient's body and that they seemed to be accompanied by a free flow of breath and a general sense of well-being. Reich later came to postulate that these streamings were part of the flow of a primordial cosmic energy, or *orgone*<sup>22</sup> energy, which animated all living matter.

Reich's postulate of a universal energy sits comfortably with Eastern traditions, such as Taoist Yoga, Tantric Yoga or Kundalini Yoga, all of which uphold a fundamental belief in a primordial, creative energy or force which the practitioner must learn to control and channel properly in his own body. The Indian symbol for this energy is Kundalini,

"a spirit buried in the earth, asleep and waiting to be awakened and purified. Kundalini is a serpent, one of Mercury's typical forms in European alchemy. Lying dormant in the base of the spine, the Kundalini symbolizes pulsatile, vibrant, energetic changes which may awaken either spontaneously or through hatha yoga exercises and breathing meditation. When awakened, the Kundalini must be guided through the various body centres, or chakras, which she in turn energizes" (Mindell, 1998, p. 101).

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<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, Carl Jung believed the autonomous nervous system to be the bridge between psyche and body.

<sup>22</sup> Reich coined the term 'orgone' from the words 'organism' and 'orgasm'.

The Balinese performer I Wayan Lendra (1997) has described the awakening of Kundalini as the most important aspect of Grotowski's work during Objective Drama. He asserts that "[I]n the arts, this ability to awaken innate physical power and invoke this energy is a necessity. An artist who has this ability is considered to have *taksu*, an ultimate spiritual energy that helps the performer project the essence of his or her art" (p. 327). Lendra further asserts that highly competent spiritual practitioners, such as priests and traditional healers also have *taksu*, that they can invoke and receive "signs and messages from nature" to help "restore the balance of life in the community" (ibid). We can, of course, relate this back to our earlier exploration of drama therapy as shamanism. What is perhaps fair to say is that in modern somatic and expressive arts therapies the awakening of Kundalini (in the therapist or the patient) is more incidental to the process of healing, whereas in Grotowski's work in Objective Drama and also Art as Vehicle and in many spiritual traditions such awakening is the primary goal.

In somatic and expressive arts therapies, a patient's awareness is heightened, allowing sensations and impulses to surface, which are then amplified through movement, voice work and other forms of creative expression - so that a client may tap into the underlying meaning of a physical ailment and initiate a shift and release of the experienced symptoms. Starks Whitehouse called the process of allowing the impulse to take the form of physical action 'active imagination in movement' - a direct reference to and extension of Carl Jung's work who coined the term 'active imagination'. Jung regarded active imagination as the most important auxiliary which could facilitate dialogue between unconscious and conscious contents of the psyche, and thus lead to a more harmonious and balanced personality, by a means of an expressive engagement with one's inner images, inner voices or psychosomatic symptoms. Jung alluded to a wide variety of expressive media in his work, from creative writing, to drawing, painting and sculpting, as well as music, dance and dramatic enactment - the roots of modern arts therapies are to be found in Jung's own play and the play with his patients. Crucially, unlike Freud who regarded the unconscious as "limited to contents rejected and repressed from consciousness" (Miller, 2004, p. 2), Jung believed the unconscious to be an intelligent, purposeful guide, "a mysterious landscape of autonomous, teleological intelligence that compensates for, supplements, even opposes consciousness" (ibid). Active imagination could thus enable a person to apprehend his true nature, his most essential Self.

Jung regarded active imagination as a better means of confrontation with the unconscious than free association or dream analysis, because it had the advantage of quickening the process of maturation. "Since by active imagination all the material is produced in a conscious state of mind, the material is far more rounded out than the dreams with their precarious language" (Jung in Chodorow, 1997, p. 146). One must note that by producing material 'in a conscious state' Jung did not mean to suggest that egoic consciousness was in charge of the

dialogue with the unconscious, rather than the process of active imagination was sustained by a conscious effort to let go and to surrender to the natural flow of events. Jung was keen to distinguish active imagination from fantasy which he regarded as superficial, indulgent and escapist.

“A fantasy is more or less your own invention, and remains on the surface of personal things and conscious expectations. But active imagination, as the term denotes, means that the images have a life of their own and that the symbolic events develop according to their own logic - that is, of course, if your conscious reason does not interfere. [...] We can really produce precious little by our conscious mind. All the time we are dependent upon the things that literally fall into our consciousness; therefore in German we call them Einfälle. [...] We depend entirely upon the benevolent co-operation of our unconscious. [...] [w]e overestimate the power of intention and the will” (Jung, 1995, GW 18.1, par. 398).<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Raff (2000) asserts that fantasy never transcends the ego, indeed that fantasy leads to ego inflation, illusion and stagnation, and that a confusion of fantasy with imagination is dangerous.

“There is in fantasy no real experience of inner wisdom: it is only the playing out of one image after another that titillates, amuses, or even terrifies. Even in the case of negative fantasy, however, the ego is the star of the piece. [...] confusing fantasy with imagination, and confounding active imagination with ego manipulation is damaging and at times dangerous. An inability to differentiate fantasy from active imagination precludes a real relationship with the self, and perpetuates the ego’s illusions that it alone is of value” (pp. 47 - 48).

Jung noted that the process of active imagination, too, is not without its dangers, for it is likely to lead to the spontaneous eruption of unconscious contents into the conscious mind. The danger is specifically that

“the subliminal contents already possess such a high energy charge that, when afforded an outlet by active imagination, they may overpower the conscious mind and take possession of the personality. This gives rise to a condition which - temporarily, at least - cannot easily be distinguished from schizophrenia, and may even lead to a genuine ‘psychotic interval’” (Jung, 1995, GW 8, II, prefatory note).

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<sup>23</sup> Connecting back to Victor Turner’s explorations of theatre and ritual we may identify liminoid entertainment as an egoic engagement with *fantasy*, whilst liminal play is a form of *active imagination*.

The question of potentially negative impact of creative activity is one which I have grappled with in my work with clients in Creative Alternatives and I would like to take a brief detour into research pertaining to creativity and psychopathology before returning to Jung.

Recent research (e.g. Akiskal & Akiskal, 1988; Andreasen, 1987; Barrantes-Vidal, 2004; Goodwin & Jamison, 1990) has shown that there are correlations between affective psychosis, specifically bipolar disorder, and creativity. Barrantes-Vidal (2004) defends the view that creativity and the temperamental roots of psychosis share common causative traits at biological, emotional and cognitive levels. Jamison (1993) has shown that cognition in hypomanic states “shares common aspects with creative cognition: a quantitative increase of ideational fluency, high mental speed and cognitive flexibility, and the enhanced capacity for combinatory thinking, that is, the association of old elements into new and original ideas” (Jamison in Barrantes-Vidal, 2004, p. 69). In recent years a dimensional view of psychopathology has come into fashion which asserts that psychotic disorders are contiguous with normal personality dimensions. In parallel fashion, creativity has also been ‘dimensionalised’ and psychometric studies have attempted to establish the personality correlates of trait-creativity. A substantial number of studies have found a “positive and significant association between Eysenck’s Psychoticism Scale (P) and trait-creativity” (Barrantes-Vidal, 2004, p. 74). Eysenck (1995) found that participants who scored “high on P and on creativity tests present some common features: unusual patterns of word-sorting, more divergent thinking, and less degree of *cognitive inhibition*” (Barrantes-Vidal, 2004, p. 74). On an emotional level psychometric studies have found associations between creativity and ‘Openness to Experience’ (McGrae, 1987).

The results from these studies seem consistent with Thalbourne’s research (e.g. 1991) which indicates that there exists a common thread underlying creative personality, psychopathology and also mystical experience. Thalbourne coined the term *transliminality*<sup>24</sup> to describe this common factor which he defined as “a largely involuntary susceptibility to, and awareness of, large volumes of inwardly generated psychological phenomena of an ideational and affective kind” (Thalbourne & Delin, 1994, p. 25).

In my own experience within Creative Alternatives I found that, in line with the above research, those clients who had entered the programme due to a diagnosis of bipolar disorder

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<sup>24</sup> Thalbourne coined the term ‘transliminality’ from the Latin words ‘trans’ (meaning the ‘tendency to cross’) and limen (meaning ‘threshold’). The concept of transliminality dates back to the late nineteenth century when notions of a threshold were first applied to psychological phenomena. “Sensory thresholds were already the subject of psychophysics, but sometimes in the nineteenth century there arose the idea that our everyday empirical consciousness lay above a threshold of sorts and that below that consciousness and that threshold was a whole region of mind with its own characteristics” (Thalbourne, 2000, p. 1).

seemed the most creative. According to Richards et al (1992) bipolarity and its cyclical nature which juxtaposes positive (manic) and negative (depressive) moods gives rise to more complex mental organisation, marked by forms of cognition associated with creativity, such as *Janusian*<sup>25</sup> *thinking*, defined by Rothenberg (1990) as the mental process by which multiple opposites are conceived simultaneously. "The person remains aware that the concepts are in opposition, which prompts the mental effort to generate original thoughts that provide reconciliation" (Barrantes-Vidal, 2004, p. 69).

Janusian thinking brings us back to Jung who proposed that the unconscious and the conscious realms of the psyche contained opposite, complementary material. Jung believed that by means of a confrontation between the unconscious and the conscious - "as if a dialogue were taking place between two human beings" (Jung in Miller, 2004, p.3) - the 'transcendent function' of the psyche, that is its tendency to integrate opposites, could emerge. Jung believed that it was the psyche's natural propensity to move towards higher levels of integration and insight.

"The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living third thing [...] a movement out of the suspension between the opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being" (Jung in Miller, 2004, p.3).

Raff (2000, p. 69) asserts that the transcendent function not only initiates a change in consciousness but also an energetic change. When two opposites are united, the energy of each is transformed and made available to the self which gains in psychic energy and thus becomes stronger and more stable, as well as more malleable. Throughout his career Jung immersed himself in the study of European and Arabic alchemy - and he found that the *conjunction of opposites* plays an important role in the transmutation process of substances. Jung regarded the study of alchemy as highly significant to his investigations in psychology and psychotherapy because the early alchemists lacked the necessary epistemological distance from the objects of their study. Thus, whilst describing the phenomena of the outer world, they freely projected their own psychic background into the data.

"This was a time when the mind of the alchemist was still grappling with the problems of matter, when the exploring consciousness was confronted by the dark void of the unknown, in which figures and laws were dimly perceived and attributed to matter although they really belonged to the psyche. Everything unknown and empty is filled with psychological projection; it is as if the investigator's own psychic background were mirrored in the darkness. What he sees in matter, or thinks he can see, is chiefly the data of his own unconscious

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<sup>25</sup> In Roman mythology Janus was the god of passages, doorways and bridges. Janus is usually depicted with two faces which look in opposite directions.

which he is projecting into it. In other words, he encounters in matter, as apparently belonging to it, certain qualities and potential meanings of whose psychic nature he is entirely unconscious" (Jung, 1995, GW, par. 332).

Jung found that alchemical texts were tremendously rich in psychic content and by studying them he was able to gain a deeper insight into the structure of the psyche. The phenomenon of psychic projection has played an important role in my research and I would like to highlight a few considerations before returning to Jung's study of alchemy. Projection is a universal human phenomenon. We do not see the world as it is but as we remember it and as we believe it to be. As von Franz (1980) elucidates, "Philosophically speaking, you cannot relate without projection [...] A quality in another person can only be recognized if one has the same quality and knows what it feels like" (pp. 34 - 35). Von Franz further explains that if the projection fits, if it is an accurate mirror of the other then there is no problem. However, if there is a mismatch which hampers our view, then the projection ought to be corrected. Von Franz asserts that the same applies in the natural sciences:

"Even the most scientific and most modern and most accurate forms of modern natural sciences are all based on projections. Progress in science is the replacement of a primitive projection by one more accurate, so that one can say that natural science is concerned with the projection of models of reality into which phenomena seem to fit better, or less well" (ibid, p. 36).

Theatre as therapy and theatre as performance craft differ in their use of projection. Conventional talking therapies stress the relationship between therapist and client and the therapeutic processes which unfold within that relationship involve projection on part of the client (*transference*) and on part of the therapist (*countertransference*). In theatre as therapy, which often unfolds in groups, transferences and countertransferences can play out in a number of ways between the leader of the group and the group, between in the leader and an individual member of the group and between participants. Psychodrama makes overt use of projection by letting participants become co-actors, or transference figures, in the drama of a protagonist. Similar processes of projection can unfold in dramatherapy; however, many dramatherapists prefer to emphasise the use of dramatic structure and playspace as containers for projection. In theatre as performance craft, there is no therapist. There is a director who gives feedback directed towards the montage of a performance or the execution of technique or of a performance score - but this feedback does not generally enter into the personal world of the actor, who is left to project (unconsciously) onto the dramatic structure, the performance space and colleagues. We will revisit the dynamics of projection in the following chapters.

Let us return to Jung's study of the alchemical process. I would like to introduce the territory of alchemy in greater depth not only because, according to Jung, it sheds profound light on

the human psyche but also because my practical encounters with my co-researcher Antero Alli unfolded within the metaphorical context of alchemy as I participated in a three-month workshop entitled 'The Alchemy Laboratory'. Jung asserts that alchemy was both concerned with chemical work in the laboratory and with psychological processes which accompanied the transmutation of matter - which were in part unconscious projections, as mentioned earlier, but also conscious, as reflected in alchemical treatises, such as Gerardus Dorneus' (1530 - 1584) *Philosophia Chemica*. Here Dorneus explains that the alchemist must work on himself to accomplish the same process of transformation that he aims to achieve on the substance he is working with, for "In truth the form, which is the intellect of man, is the beginning, middle and end of the procedure" (in Jung, 1995, GW 12, par. 366) and "things are perfected by their like", thus "if the investigator does not remotely possess the likeness [i.e., to the work] he will not climb the height I have described, nor reach the road that leads to the goal" (ibid, par. 375).

Jung elucidates that there is no such thing as a finite procedure in alchemy, rather alchemical treatises depict a great array of methods by which the *prima materia*, the initial substance/ state, may be transmuted into the *lapis philosophorum*, the final substance/ state, the names of which reflect ideas concerned with "permanence (extension of life, immortality, incorruptibility), androgyny, spirituality and physicality, being human or being like human (homunculus) and divinity" (1995, GW 14.1, prefatory note, my translation). Jung regards the primary process of alchemy as the *mysterium coniunctionis*, the conjunction of opposites which are "either confronting one another in enmity, or attracting one another in love" (ibid, par. 1, my translation). Jung emphasizes that this process of conjunction is also the central aim of psychoanalysis.

"Therapy confronts the opposites [in the psyche] and aims for their lasting conjunction. Images of this goal which occur in dreams often correspond to the respective alchemistic symbols" (ibid, prefatory note, my translation).

Examples of pairs of opposites in alchemical texts are numerous. Jung regards them as the "phenomenology of the paradoxical Self, the human totality. That is why its symbolism reaches for expressions of a cosmic nature like caelum - terra [Latin, 'heaven - earth', JB]" (ibid, par. 4, my translation). Jung highlights their *transconscious character* - opposites are often represented as royalty on the one hand and as animals on the other hand - which indicates that they "do not belong to the ego-personality but are supraordinate to it" (ibid). Jung elucidates that opposites are also expressed in quaternities, such as the four elements, the four seasons, the four directions, etc. The quaternity gives rise to the universal symbol of the cross which has numerous meanings, e.g. in the traditional circular symbols for the elements it stands for the element of earth (a cross in or above a circle), the heaviest of the elements which is said to contain all others.

As is widely known, the cross plays a central role in the Christian tradition through which I have come to apprehend it as a symbol of 'death' and 'sacrifice'. Although I am somewhat estranged from my Catholic roots the central image of Jesus on the cross became an important gateway for my work in Antero Alli's 'Alchemy Laboratory'. As Roob (2005) puts it, quoting the alchemist Jacob Böhme, "Everything that wishes to have divine light must go through the dying, magic fire and exist in it, just as the heart on the cross must exist in the fire of God.' If the soul does not pass the threshold of the cross, it remains in the realm of the dark fire of fear" (p. 251). In alchemy, the cross is used as the glyph for the crucible, in which the Great Work unfolds. "...the crucible is the place where the Prime Matter suffers the passion like Christ himself. There it dies, to be reawakened, purified, spiritualized and transformed" (Fulcanelli in Roob, 2005, p. 522). In the work of Christian alchemists like Böhme the figure of Christ is signifies the lapis, the all encompassing, redeeming elixir which awakens divinity within humanity. As Roob asserts quoting Blake, "Jesus is 'imagination or the divine body in all men', the 'sole, universal form' in which all things are contained 'in their Eternal Forms'" (ibid, p. 523).

"Awake! Awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! Expand!  
I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine"  
(William Blake, Jerusalem, 1804 - 1820)

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."  
(Ephesians 5:14)

In many mythologies the cross is also identified with the Tree of Life or World Tree on which the gods are crucified to undergo death and resurrection in order to achieve full godhood. "Odin hung on the World Tree Yggdrasil [...] Krishna died on a tree. Attis died on a tree. Osiris, in his dead phase, was enclosed in a tree. Men embodying the Saxon god were sacrificed to the Goddess Andaste by hanging on trees" (Walker, 1988, p. 472). Walker asserts that the congruence of the cross with the tree continued into Christianity, and indeed, several times in the New Testament it is said that Jesus was sacrificed on a tree (Acts 5:30; 1 Peter 2:24).

In alchemical writings we find several depictions of the Great Work as the Tree of Life<sup>26</sup>. In the *Anatomia Auri*, the alchemist Mylius depicts what he regarded as the three levels of the

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<sup>26</sup> We also find the symbol of the tree in Kundalini Yoga where it represents the central axis of the nervous system through which Kundalini, the serpent, can rise to the crown chakra and beyond. Similarly, in Tantric Yoga the tree is seen as a map of the human body:

"Indian tradition has always visualized the human body as growing like a plant from the ground of the beyond, the Supreme Brahman. And just as the vital juices of a plant are



work. On each level, the opposing forces (Mercury and Sulphur) sit on opposite branches until they are merged on the third level and transcended.

“The dissolving and binding powers sit opposite one another on the branches: on the bottom left is volatile Mercury with his winged shoes, and to his right is the fire spitting Sulphur. Above them, diagonally reversed, are their forms in a sublimated and crowned state. On the top level, the third Work, the two unite as lunar tincture. From this there finally emerges the solid sulphur, the son of the sun. He wears the crowns of the three realms: vegetable, animal and mineral” (Roob, 2005, p. 304).

It follows that the union of opposites in the psyche implies their ‘death’ and sublimation into higher forms. Accordingly, death is not ‘the end’ but a gateway to a third, a more integrated state of being. Mindell (1998) reminds us that in those afflicted by ill health approaching death can indeed be a teacher of life, for the disease can increase an individual’s awareness of the autonomous nature of the body. “When Death stands at the head of the bed in disease states, its healing plant is the vegetative experience of disease itself and its implication about how to live” (p. 134). The idea that death can be the healer of disease is the foundation of homeopathy, which uses small dosages of remedies that in large amounts would produce symptoms similar to those being treated.

“The fundamental generalization, the bedrock of homeopathy, is that the most successful drug for any given occasion will be the drug whose own symptomatology presents the clearest and closest resemblance to the symptom-complex of the sick person in question” (Wheeler in Mindell, 1998, p. 134).

Following the same principle, psychotherapists use mirroring and amplification as a means of increasing their clients’ awareness of unconscious material. “Carl Rogers discovered that simply repeating what someone said increases consciousness immensely. The Rogerian idea can also be applied to dream work. [...] The gestalt therapist amplifies dreams by asking the dreamer to actually become the dream figure” (Mindell, 1998, p. 135). Drama therapy and psychodrama, as well as dance/ movement therapies, are particularly potent in this respect, for they work directly with the bodily amplification and expression of symptoms and conflicts. The Swiss psychoanalyst Remo Roth, a student of Marie-Louise von Franz, speaks of the

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carried up and outwards from the root through the channels and veins, so are the creative energies in the human body. Only the root of the human plant is not below, but above, beyond the top of the skull over the spine. The nourishing and bewildering energy flows in from beyond that point. [...] The pattern of veins and channels which compose this system is called the subtle body and is the basis of all Tantric worship and yoga” (Rawson, 1973, pp. 20 - 21).

Such depictions are further reminiscent of the Sephirothic tree in Kabbalistic teachings which is also a map of the human body, as well as a map of the path to active engagement with the Divine.

symptom as the 'inner ally'. Roth (2003) suggests that in deep introverted observation of the body, "we can free images or even an 'inner movie' [...], corresponding in an acausal way to our body and its diseases." Roth, whose method of 'body centered imagination' is founded on the working practices of the alchemist Paracelus, asserts that when we are able to perceive and amplify these images, then they will transform of their own accord and the corresponding symptoms of disease will shift and transform<sup>27</sup>.

## Conclusion

In this literature review I have presented a great variety of ideas pertaining to theatre as a transformative practice, highlighting the differences between theatre as therapy, theatre as performance craft and theatre as work on the self. In doing so, I have introduced Freudian, Reichian and Jungian ideas amongst others, pertaining to the practice of psychodramatists and drama therapists, as well as being of relevance to seminal theatre practitioners like Artaud, Stanislavski and Grotowski. I have further attempted to synthesize concepts from spiritual traditions in the East and West, touching upon shamanic ritual and yogic practices, as well as medieval European alchemical studies. I am aware that any synthetic enterprise is fraught with the danger of romantic oversimplification and lack of critical differentiation. I am also aware that a psychological study of transformation warrants the inclusion of many more theories by psychologists and therapists, such as Maslow, Washburn, Assagioli and Grof. However, in my selection of the materials I have focused on concepts which seemed particularly relevant to the experiences and ideas of my co-researchers, many of whom have drawn from a similarly complex range of sources in the attempt to illuminate the processes of transformation which they continue to encounter in their work.

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<sup>27</sup> Roth (2003) emphasizes that deep inner observation requires an identification with Eros consciousness which he contrasts with Logos consciousness. Jung (1995, GW 14.1, pars. 216 - 226) refers to Logos and Eros as *Sol and Luna*, the male and female expressions of consciousness, the former of which drives us to separate and categorize, whilst the latter compels us to create and perceive relationships. Roth stresses that in the West we have become over identified with a degenerate form Logos consciousness which espouses extrovert intellectualism at the cost of introvert, intuitive ways of knowing. He emphasizes that Westerners must first learn to reconnect with their 'brain' in the gut, in order to be able to relate to and to express the symptoms and corresponding images of their psychesoma.

# Chapter 4:

## Inquiry Results - Cluster Depictions

In the following chapter I present six cluster depictions, each of which introduces ideas related to one particular path of theatre-based practice. Each path portrayed presents a unique perspective on Theatre as a Transformative Practice. Thus, each depiction is unique in structure, honouring the vision of the company/practitioner depicted.

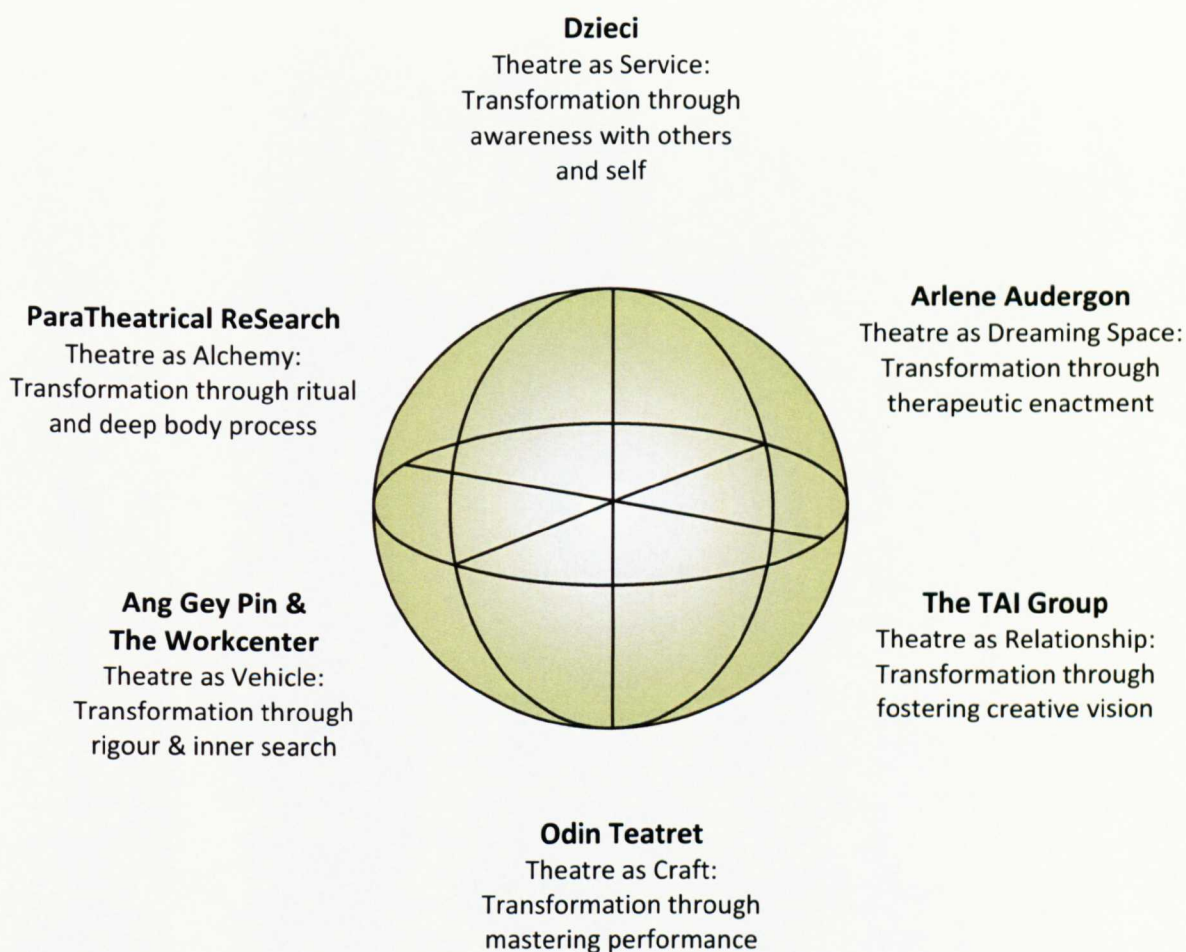


Figure 4.1: Sphere of six cluster depictions.

**Please note:** The process of qualitative data analysis in heuristics is immersive and person-centred, honouring biographical material as much as topic-centred material. Thus the full six depictions to which this study gave rise include extensive background material which may be regarded as more peripheral to the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, I chose to create cluster depictions in this inquiry, bringing together the ideas of several individuals who operate under the same framework/pathway. As explained in Chapter 2 on the methodology, I determined that the reader's task would be more focused by seeing the cluster depictions in abbreviated form. I have chosen to present only Arlene Audergon's depiction (due to its brevity) in full. The remaining five depictions are edited versions of the full cluster depictions. All material thus omitted is clearly indicated at the appropriate point in the depictions. **The Composite Depiction and the Creative Synthesis, which follow the present chapter, have been constructed with due regard to the full cluster depictions, which can be found in Appendices K.1 - K.5.**

As explained in chapter 2, the depictions are based on a number of sources. Apart from conducting co-researcher interviews, I participated in the work of my co-researchers and where possible I created reflective workshop diaries to capture my experiences. The diaries proved invaluable in that they helped me penetrate further into the research topic which can really only be grasped through practical immersion, through doing. I thus regard these diaries as data of equal importance to the interviews and I quote from them, as well as from the interview transcripts. Where appropriate I also draw from my co-researchers' writings to further illuminate particular ideas and concepts. Please note that I refer to my co-researchers by their first name. However, following academic conventions, whenever I cite from their writings I refer to them by their second name. At the beginning of each depiction I provide a list of the sources upon which the depiction is based.

# Arlene Audergon

## *Theatre as Dreaming Space*

The following depiction reflects on aspects of the practice of psychotherapist Arlene Audergon, PhD, who works in the fields of theatre, mental health and conflict resolution. Arlene trained in Process Oriented Psychology, a fusion of Jungian thought with Taoism, theoretical physics and consciousness studies, which was developed by the Jungian analyst and physicist Arnold Mindell. Together with her husband Jean-Claude, Arlene founded the Research Society for Process Oriented Psychology UK which oversees training and research in Process Work in Britain (<http://www.rspopuk.com>). Arlene's love of theatre led her to apply Process Work in the performing arts and other art forms: She has worked with actors, directors, puppeteers, musicians, singers and writers in Los Angeles, Berlin and London. Arlene co-directed 'Spirit' (2001), with the London based ensemble Improbable Theatre. Together with her husband Jean-Claude she now runs regular 'Arts Atelier' evenings in London, for which she invites guest artists to "work with them on the very edges of their creative work. And others can watch or participate. It's not a workshop, and not a show. The idea is to develop a culture of exploring the creative process together" (in Diamond, 2005, lines 198 - 200). Arlene has also written widely on topics pertaining to Process Work, conflict resolution, creativity and psychotherapy.

I have had very limited contact with Arlene, and this depiction will not explore the entire spectrum of her work. Instead I will focus on the intersection of Arlene's Process Work with theatre, an area which she herself has been keen to explore. In doing so, I draw upon one interview I conducted with Arlene (**APPENDIX D.1**), as well as on Mindell's (1998) *Dreambody*, and on a brief interview conducted with Arlene by her colleague Julie Diamond (**APPENDIX D.2**).

From left:  
Lee Simpson, Phelim McDermott & Guy Darnell  
Improbable Theatre Company, performing SPIRIT.  
Co-directed by Arlene Audergon.  
Photo: Sara Krutwich, New York Times, 2005.

## Origins and Connections

Arlene studied Process Oriented Psychology with Arnold Mindell in Zürich. The approach hit a core with her, because it brought together her diverse interests in Jungian psychology, family therapy and spirituality, as well as incorporating creative movement and body work. Process Oriented Psychology, or Process Work, is a psychotherapeutic method which encompasses a broad range of applications, from self-therapy to counseling individuals, couples and families. Process Work also applies the tools and concepts of process and dreaming to groups, communities and social issues in a branch of the work called Worldwork.

Arlene Audergon.  
Photographer unknown.

Arlene is one of the first Process Work facilitators to explore the intersection between acting and Process Oriented Psychology. In interview with Julie Diamond (2005) she recalls that when she was studying Process Work, “there were many moments at a seminar or workshop, watching what was happening, when I had a sudden flash of inspiration of how Process Work goes together with theatre” (lines 13 - 15). When I interviewed Arlene she shared with me that the process of symptom amplification through enactment sparked in her the desire to understand what makes for good theatre.

“Arny Mindell was working with a friend of mine and she was working on an allergy. [...] So she started to amplify which means ‘to feel it more, to get into it more, to let it grow’. So she entered into this allergy and [...] this wonderful figure came out and she was demanding from us to get her this and that. [...] We were all running around serving her - and as I looked at this queen figure ... I can still remember her ... this queen figure that had come out of this little itch ... I knew that there was a key there. That this was highly theatrical stuff ... the way it kept us going! It was psychological, certainly, it was about her integrating her more demanding side, she tended to be shy and think that ‘You shouldn’t be demanding’ and she was now becoming this queen [...] and she was able to be demanding. That was the psychological element. But the theatrical element was the joy we had in discovering that, it was very personal and mythic at the same time. [...] I remember thinking ‘This stuff is incredible for theatre.’ - And unique because we were working not psychologically in the sense of thinking about it or analysing it but we were finding a signal and unfolding it to its core ... and in there you’d find the dream figures and the mythic figures (my interview, lines 56 - 81).

Speaking to her friend Julie who was the protagonist of this enactment and who interviewed Arlene some time later she asserts,

“The queen was a mythic character, but so personal at the same time, because she was aligned with something in your personal psychology - and we all recognized her, too, as that itch in each of us to be our majestic selves. It was a moment that was so real, comedic, and mythic; I remember thinking, ‘Wow, this is such good theater’” (Diamond, 2005, lines 21 - 24).

Mindell calls the psychological counterpart of physical symptoms or body signals *dream figures*.

“From the viewpoint of body awareness, the images of dreams and fairy tales are symbols of psychological as well as physiological processes. The physiological corollary of the Self, the organizing power behind psycho-physical processes, is the dreambody. This power restlessly yearning for development, appears in illnesses, body symptoms, compulsions and ‘doings’” (1998, p. 228).

Arlene asserts that our night time dreams continue to unfold during the day.

“The dreams are actually here ... while we’re awake. And they send signals. It’s an amazingly simple thing but it’s quite something to discover it in a practical or experiential sense... It’s something you don’t identify with and there’s a belief system. There is an edge ... and beyond that you say “That’s not me”. A person shouldn’t flirt. Or a person shouldn’t be demanding. Yes? That’s a belief system; it’s cultural and so on. And it keeps us apart from certain aspects of ourselves” (my interview, lines 195 - 200).

Arnold Mindell and Arlene believe that any physical symptom and/or state thus contains meaningful information which can aid a person’s development. As Arlene expresses, “the symptom is the signal that needs unfolding. It has information in it that’s useful. It’s the body dreaming, you can say ... and the dream is bringing information for your evolution (ibid, line 52 - 54). However, Mindell stresses that it is fruitless to correlate individual organic problems with psychological dynamics. Rather, a holistic approach is required, for “...all physiological processes appear to be governed by single gestalts and their dreamlike processes. These processes seem to choose any and all available signals or labile organs for expression. [...] If we want to get at the individual roots of body processes we must observe the personal, changing experience of the body” (1998, pp. 51 - 52).

Arlene proposes that the whole-bodied approach of Process Work is highly effective in amplifying and enacting unintended signals and body experiences, enabling a person to

become more congruent by way of embodying parts of oneself that are not normally in conscious awareness. Process Workers call such lack of congruence *double-signalling*.

“We do it all day long. We send a certain bunch of signals that are intended and then other signals are coming on their own without our awareness ... and those are being sent by dream figures. And you can chart that ... it’s quite marvellous ... there is a signal ... and then you remember that you dreamt this or that ... and it’s connected to that signal (my interview, lines 187 - 191).

Congruence thus comes from “not just identifying with the one set of signals whilst the other ones fire in the background, BUT it comes from intentionally picking up those signals, inhabiting them and recognising and acknowledging ‘That is me too’” (ibid, lines 202 - 205). The process is very theatrical, in that the protagonists of Process Work “shape-shift” (ibid, line 182) into another, an unfamiliar part of themselves.

Arlene further asserts that congruence in actors makes for particularly appealing theatre. The most interesting theatrical moments are those in which actors, whilst in character, are congruent with their own dream figures which communicate through signals the actor often regards as disturbing, uncomfortable, unwanted.

“...actors are often trying to rid themselves of certain signals that they think aren’t working for them. And the idea in process work is the opposite. If you take those unexpected signals and you go into them, take their view, unfold them ... what seems disturbing, like a tick and the last thing you’d want, is actually the beginning of a whole discovery process, revealing parts of yourself you aren’t that familiar with” (ibid, lines 165 - 171).

Observing incongruent moments in actors, Arlene sees

“all the signals of the character that the actor is intending to portray and other signals as well. I see the actor’s *double signal*, that is, the signals that the actor doesn’t know she is sending. These may be signals that belong to the character that the actor is trying - unsuccessfully - to get rid of. It turns out that these double signals are the key to making a fresh and congruent performance” (in Diamond, 2005, lines 92 - 97).

Arlene tried to study highly engaging moments in theatre and film to understand more deeply how they work (see my interview, lines 214 - 219). Arlene realised that what made these moments so compelling was that they could not be taken apart.

“I realised that that was one of the answers to the question. When something is that congruent you can’t take it apart anymore. You can’t see double signals anymore. There is a wholeness; there is that same congruence that I had seen



in the psychological work ... you see it there. The actors are really doing it" (ibid, lines 223- 226).

In her interview with Julie Diamond, Arlene brings an example from her work with actors:

"Once, I was working with an actor on a scene from the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, by Tom Stoppard. It's a play about two minor characters from Hamlet. So, this actor was doing a particular scene that was supposed to be comical, and he was having a really hard time. The funnier he tried to be, the worse it went. I came in and tried various things with him, but nothing worked. I noticed he was suffering from an inner critic. So I thought, 'OK, the inner critic!' And I did this very basic Process Work intervention. I asked him to represent the critic. He enacted the critic, and said things like 'You have not understood the character' I asked him, 'Who are you?' And he answered, without pause, 'I am Shakespeare' Our veins went cold. I said 'Oh my God,' and expressed my gratitude and humility to him that he would show up at our rehearsal. I truly meant it. I asked Shakespeare if he could help the actor with his performance, if he would be willing to give us advice. Shakespeare, (and/ or this part of the actor) was very congruent - no play acting - and directed himself how to play Rosencrantz! He (Shakespeare) explained to the actor the themes of fate and chance, and free will. As the actor then picked up the serious meaning of the play, and Shakespeare's direction, he did not have to try to be funny. Now the underlying meaning came through, and the comic elements of the scene could just flow" (in Diamond, 2005, lines 118 - 132).

Arlene highlights that both in actors and Process Work clients, awareness of the dream figure signals is the key; and awareness goes to the heart of the individuation process. "It's not like being self-conscious ... you're in it [the drama, JB] and you're conscious at the same time. And to me that's good theatre. And that is what it means to individuate. To be in your life, to be in all those weird parts and to be conscious" (my interview, lines 237 - 240). Dream figures represent a person's unconscious processes which are always, to a lesser or greater degree, rooted in collective, archetypal material. "...that differentiation is slightly artificial ... they could be both: archetypal ... with a personal dimension. Some figures are more archetypal than others (ibid, lines 244 - 245). In her work with actors Arlene noticed that the best performances were those in which the actors, through their character work, were tapping archetypal sources.

"...what was a really amazing discovery for me - like Eureka! I was so excited - was that the signals that are being sent are the actor's unconscious psychology, right, parts of themselves they don't know, BUT they were ALSO signals sent by the character of the show. It's amazing. If the character is an archetype ... and you're engaging with the character ... these archetypes come straight through and signal through the performer's complex or psychology, so if you work on these signals, you come to an interface between what is very personal and what is universal ... that person's growing edge" (ibid, lines 273 - 279).

Arlene suggests that great actors are able to tap into their “juicy spot” (ibid, line 280), the personal intersection between a character and the corresponding archetype, and play and embody this archetype and make it human ... in a way that no one else would be able to. It is by means of penetrating the intersection of the personal with the archetypal that we can identify with another, ‘become’ another. Talking to Arlene I was reminded of my role play experiences during mediation training in which we shared and played out each other’s deepest conflicts.

**Arlene:** ...You play a role and you play at it ... and then ... we do this as a technique ... you need to feel it until it’s real...

**Jessica:** I remember the role feeling so real! So authentic.

**Arlene:** It is real, there is nothing more real.

**Jessica:** At first it’s not your conflict and suddenly it is your conflict and you are in tears, even though it wasn’t your own problem!

**Arlene:** That is the transpersonal level also that you are interested in, in the end we all share these things. And we need to experience that ... each in our own personal way. We need to explore what we each bring to a role in our personal way” (ibid, lines 302 - 314).

Arlene reminds me that transferences and countertransferences also operate in this way. We fall into another person’s story, take on a role in their story and their dream figures begin to signal through us. Process Workers call this ‘dreaming up’.

## **Theatre and the Witness**

Reflecting upon actors in rehearsal and performance, Arlene suggests that performances either cause actors to freeze (and become disconnected) or to become more alive, because they are subjected to the heat of the witnessing process. The spectator is both external witness and projected witness. “...what we were talking about before, that sense of consciousness ... ‘being in it’ and having consciousness at the same time is sort of accelerated and inhabited in the theatre” (ibid, lines 383 - 385). Arlene suggests that actors must learn to witness their own work and to share that witnessing with others. “As an actor, as a director, as a coach and therapist you need to be conscious ... to be good” (ibid, lines 401 - 402). At the same time Arlene recognises that good actors ‘lose themselves’ in their part.

“...it’s a bit of a shamanic thing, to dive in ... but it’s not the same as just diving in and then drowning! You dive in and you are aware, you’re conscious inside of it.

In process work we used to say it's like having a snorkel. You go into it but you have a snorkel ... and sometimes you really need to dive into something and not know what the hell you're doing and then wake up ... so consciousness isn't about staying outside or analysing ... I don't mean it that way. A really good theatre moment can be more real than real life! It can cut into something that is really human. Whereas when you're jumping around in your everyday life you can be less real ... because you're sort of in it" (ibid, lines 407 - 415).

Arlene regards the actor's relationship with the spectator as the central element in theatre. This relationship unfolds on many levels, conscious and unconscious. Actors can play at 'making it work' and unconsciously signal another story. Similarly, audiences can fall into collusion with an actor's self-deception and mirror the lie by feigning the response which the actor seeks. Audiences can also fall into the unconscious story of the actor, embodying unprocessed, unconscious material. "...if, in the process of making the whole show, the critics haven't been processed, they will often be projected onto the audience or the audience themselves will become critical ... and this might freeze the performer" (ibid, lines 386 - 388).

Arlene regards theatre as a shared dreaming space. She regards it as a failing of many modern productions which try to engage the audience by involving them directly in the action, putting them on the spot.

"And it stays on this outer level ... whereas many people go to the theatre because they want to dream. And theatre invites you to dream in the classic sense ... when the lights go low ... you are invited into a dream ... and you go into another world. You can look at that psychologically ... it's about a more spiritual, transpersonal story that's connecting all of us. A sense of oneness, a sense of unity, a sense of being transported or being transformed, you know, by what touches you deeply ... and that's very much a spiritual activity. And that's part of the purpose of theatre. Always has been ... for the actors and for the audience" (ibid, lines 459 - 466).

Arlene regards theatre as ritual. If the ritual is alive (and not just a going through the motions) then it enables the community of actors and spectators to tap into "that source ... that creative part ... it's like a renewal of the spirit (ibid, lines 496). Such theatre, Arlene asserts, is not only highly entertaining and inspirational - such theatre can heal and it can unite human beings and enable them to transcend conflicts.

Arlene insists that in today's world, sadly, much performance (in theatre, television and film) lacks awareness and unfolds at the opposite end of the spectrum.

"At *Improbable* we used to talk about theatre that is trying to comment on a social issue ... but instead of really bringing awareness to it it's just repeating it! ... Say, the show is about rape and so it just becomes real violent and practically

demonstrates a rape ... and you're supposed to say "Oh my God, isn't rape awful!" but you don't really ... it's like all the shit on television. Rather than taking something very serious and going into it with awareness and with the possibility of transformation! Or least have a comment on it - and not just being it! You're just blasted with something that is awful" (ibid, lines 506 - 512).

Arlene asserts that the true role of the witness, interior and exterior, is to be present and available, so that the performer's and spectator's awareness may transcend the ordinary and enter the mythic, the archetypal, the transpersonal<sup>28</sup> realm.

## **Spontaneity and Structure**

Arlene suggests that in performance

"...one dynamic is that people feel less free to be available to what's happening in the moment, because they are ... because the show is set ... because they're supposed to do it a certain way ... and once that happens, once you're no longer free to access these signals, these innermost experiences that you have from moment to moment the performance becomes boring. It becomes stale" (ibid, lines 347 - 351).

The challenge is to be alive within the strict boundary of the performance structure. Arlene recalls her work with Improbable Theatre whose approach was improvisation "at a really deep sensory level" (ibid, lines 367). Arlene recalls that the three actors of the company were very adept at remaining alive in performance, they were always 'in the moment'.

## **Individual and collective transformation**

We come to examine process work in community settings. Arlene believes that if an individual transforms, this transformation has an impact on the wider community. Reflecting upon her work with people in 'extreme states' who are in psychiatric care, she suggests that "one of the reasons why people can't process all that's going on for them individually is because they are experiencing things which aren't just their own - [...] certain people carry messages that belong to the wider community" (ibid, lines 558 - 561). Conversely, in process work those who witness the processes unfolding help the protagonists carry the weight of the experience. Arlene insists therefore, that processes of transformation are always both individual and collective. Arlene brings examples from Worldwork in which process oriented psychologists

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<sup>28</sup> I am using the term 'transpersonal' here in the Jungian sense, meaning 'über-persönlich', i.e. 'going beyond the personality'.

work with large groups, addressing social issues like racism, homophobia, east-west dynamics, religious prejudice. Within these contexts Arlene has observed the same journey of transformation.

“There we were in this large room and some theme was chosen and that theme came into the middle of the room ... and roles came out of it. There was somebody screaming about racism ... ‘I’m a white man and I’ve seen it and participated in it!’ ... or real fights would come up in which there is ‘this side’ and ‘that side’. [...] You can say that transformation happens through the need to polarise at first. To really find out what a conflict is about ... instead of trying to keep it down ... you really bring it out ... by going deeply into both sides” (ibid, lines 603 - 616).

Arlene believes that through the expression and interaction with awareness of the opposition or polarity, on both inner and outer levels, conflicts can be transcended and individuals and communities can transform. Such is also the potential of theatre as dreaming space.

## *Odin Teatret*

### ***Theatre as Craft***

Much has been written about Odin's approach. The ensemble's work is extensive, intricately layered and exceedingly multi-cultural. Thus, to capture something of essence within the necessary brevity of this depiction is a challenge, and I cannot claim to know the work of Odin in depth. I had a brief opportunity to experience the ensemble in action in 2006 when I joined them for the production of *Ur-Hamlet*, an enactment of the Hamlet myth based on *Vita Amlethi* by the Danish writer Saxo Grammaticus (1150-1220), which predates Shakespeare's Hamlet by around 350 years. However, I shall not enter into explorations of the specifics of *Ur-Hamlet* for it would take us too far off-topic.

Première of *Ur-Hamlet* in Holstebro, Denmark. 2006. Left: Roberta Carreri as Gerutha & Augusto Omolú as Hamlet. Right: Cristina Wistari Formaggia as Orvendil, Julia Varley as Saxo Grammaticus & I Wayan Bawa as Fengi.

I shall instead offer a general overview of Odin Teatret and Eugenio Barba's research and practice within the framework of Theatre Anthropology, drawing on Eugenio's substantial publications, as well as other sources. Following the introduction of Odin, I shall explore the inner work of the actor through the lenses of three interviews which I conducted with company members at the end of my time with *Ur-Hamlet*, as follows:

**Roberta Carreri:** Italian born performer Roberta Carreri has been an actress, writer and director of Odin Teatret since 1974.

**Julia Varley:** British born actress Julia Varley has been with Odin Teatret since 1976.

**Eugenio Barba:** The Italian theatre practitioner Eugenio Barba is the founding director of Odin Teatret.

Interview in **APPENDIX E.1**

Interview in **APPENDIX E.2**

Interview in **APPENDIX E.3**

## Odin Teatret in Overview

### Eugenio Barba: The Search for Presence

From his first contact with theatre at the age of 15, Italian born theatre director Eugenio Barba (1936 - ) has been fascinated with the mystery of the performer's scenic presence. For decades he searched for and researched expressions of vitality on stage, techniques by which performers could become more alive, and ways in which the spectator's senses could be dilated and rendered more aware. On this journey, two points of reference stand out: Opole in Poland and Cheruthuruthy in Kerala, India.

It was in Opole at the Theatre of 13 Rows that Eugenio joined Jerzy Grotowski and his ensemble to apprentice as assistant director.

Eugenio was with Grotowski for three years, between 1961 and 1964, and during this time became a meticulous and enterprising witness of Grotowski's theatrical search, keeping notes on techniques and exercises, as well as writing and publishing on Grotowski's approach. Reflecting on the philosophical underpinnings of their practice, Eugenio recalls Hinduism as central point of their encounter.

"Ramana Maharishi (not to be confused with the guru of transcendental meditation) [I think Barba meant to refer to Maharshi here, JB] had played an important part in the life of Grotowski, and Ramakrishna in mine. We spoke of the techniques of the various *darsana* (the different points of view of Hinduism), [...] of Patanjali and his texts on hatha yoga, of Mahayana Buddhism and its Ch'an and Zen currents, of Nagarjuna and his Madhyamika or New School of Wisdom which preaches the doctrine of *Sunyata*" (Barba, 1999, pp. 48/ 49).

Grotowski's ideas around the *via negativa* were based on Nagarjuna's doctrine of *Sunyata*.

"*Sunyata*, the Void, is not nothingness. It is non-duality in which the object does not differ from the subject. The self and belief in the self are the causes of error and pain. The way to escape from error and pain is to eliminate the self. This is the Perfect Wisdom, the enlightenment that can be attained through a *via negativa*, denying worldly categories and phenomenons [sic] to the point of

denying the self and, by so doing, reaching the Void. [...] Grotowski applied this vision to the actor..." (ibid).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

Eugenio departed from Grotowski in 1964 and on 1<sup>st</sup> October set up his own theatre company, Odin Teatret in Oslo, Norway. In June 1966 the company moved to Holstebro, Denmark, where it remains to this day. The impressions of Kathakali training on Eugenio were long lasting. As Watson (1993) describes, "... this was not the end of kathakali for Barba. Not only were Grotowski's adaptations of the kathakali exercises going to be incorporated into the training of his [Watson means Eugenio's, JB] own actors during the Odin's early years, but kathakali's dual ethics, of intense discipline and regarding theatre as a vocation rather than merely a profession, were to be a model for Barba for many years to come" (p. 15). Eugenio followed in Grotowski's footsteps and like his mentor became deeply immersed in the study of Western and Eastern performance traditions. Today Odin Teatret is the production wing of the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (NTL), a world-renowned centre for performance teaching and research, as well as a publishing house and a film company, initiated by Eugenio in 1966. In addition, in 1979 Eugenio founded the International School for Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) which specifically focuses on the comparative study of performance traditions from around the world. ISTA's primary work unfolds through public gatherings which feature workshops, seminars, performances, lectures and demonstrations and which are held periodically in different countries across Europe.

In 1982, ISTA gave birth to another form of multicultural collaboration under Eugenio: *Theatrum Mundi*, the "theatre of the world". In *Theatrum Mundi* ISTA's eclectic master performers collaborate with Odin actors to stage a large-scale performance at the end of each ISTA gathering. Throughout the evolution of ISTA, *Theatrum Mundi* has matured into an intermittent ensemble, whose creative output now supersedes the ISTA gatherings. The production of *Ur-Hamlet* in 2006 in which I was privileged to participate is one such example of *Theatrum Mundi* in action. It featured amongst others Augusto Omolú, an actor from the Afro-Brazilian tradition of the Candomblé, as well as Japanese Noh actor Akira Matsui and the Gambuh Desa Batuan ensemble from Bali, all of whom performed alongside Odin actors. The performers' autonomous styles were interwoven, creating an intricate dramaturgy which has its foundations in what Eugenio calls the 'pre-expressive' level.



## Theatre Anthropology

The pre-expressive level is subject to exploration in Theatre Anthropology, a distinct field of research which emerged from ISTA's recurring meetings, and the aims and principles of which are articulated in two seminal publications: *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art Of The Performer* (Barba and Savarese, 1991) and *The Paper Canoe: Guide to Theatre Anthropology* (Barba, 1995). Theatre Anthropology concerns itself with "the study of human beings' socio-cultural and physiological behaviour in a performance situation" (Barba and Savarese, 1991, p. 8). It researches the use of the performer's physiology according to 'extra-daily body techniques' as imposed by codified performance traditions, such as Indian Odissi and Kathakali, Japanese Noh and Kabuki, and Balinese theatre. Crucially, Barba and Savarese assert that all such codified techniques are based on recurrent, transcultural principles which exist at an organic, a pre-expressive level.

"The recurrent principles at the performance's biological level make the various performer techniques possible: they are the particular utilisation of the performer's scenic presence and dynamism. Applied to certain physiological factors (weight, balance, the position of the spinal column, the direction of the eyes in space), these principles produce pre-expressive organic tensions. These new tensions generate a different energy quality, render the body theatrically 'decided', 'alive', and manifest the performer's 'presence', or scenic bios, attracting the spectator's attention before any form of personal expression takes place" (ibid, p. 7).

Barba and Savarese highlight that to the Occidental performer the concept of pure presence without expression might seem like an oxymoron, however Oriental traditions it is a common notion.

"...we could ask an actor to just be without representing anything. This would be very difficult for an actor who has no formalisation. We would just be seeing an immobile body which has no impact on our nervous system. But if you see a Balinese standing or a classical dancer just in a position, then because of the kinaesthetic sense, the sense which makes us react to the muscular trance of the other person, we recognise the impulse of, say, aggression or tenderness. Formalisation give the possibility to be present without expressing or representing anything" (Eugenio, my interview, lines 211 - 217).

Barba and Savarese refer to the Japanese writer Moriaki Watanabe who defines 'pure presence' as "performers representing their own absence" (ibid), an idea which is central in Japanese theatre. They give the example of the *kokken*: men dressed in black who assist the main actor in Noh and Kabuki. "Their presence, which expresses or represents nothing, draws so directly from the sources of the actor's energy and life that connoisseurs say that it is more difficult to be a *kokken* than an actor" (Barba and Savarese, 1991, p. 7).

In their attempt to map the field of pre-expressivity, Barba and Savarese explore a number of principles, among them the performer's work with extra-daily postures which evoke 'precarious balance'. Daily balance of the body is maintained by a complex interaction of bones, joints, ligaments and muscles, in which the ligaments do most of the work. Besides the ligaments which provide stability, we use muscular micro-movements to continuously adjust our position, and these unfold (to a large degree) on an unconscious level. We are always in motion. As Barba and Savarese assert, "Even in the most absolute immobility, these micro-movements are present, sometimes condensed, sometimes enlarged, at times more or less controlled, according to our physiological condition, our age, our profession" (ibid, p. 11). Barba and Savarese go on to suggest that in performers these micro-movements form a "kind of kernel which [...] can be modelled and amplified in order to increase the power of the performer's presence" (ibid). In extra-daily postures and movements the performers shift their centre of gravity to create unstable positions in which the muscles need to take on a much greater role to maintain the position. The muscles' micro-movements thus become a matter of conscious and amplified effort. The extra-daily body demands heightened proprioception; and it leads the performer to enact a dynamic balance which creates the impression of movement even in immobility and which draws in the attention of the spectator. As Eugenio elucidates, "As a classical dancer you can just walk on stage and the spectator will be engaged. You will be touched in your sensoreality, your nervous system by the way this person is dealing with space and has been able to create a *Verfremdungseffekt*<sup>29</sup>..." (Eugenio, my interview, lines 235 - 238).

Barba and Savarese call the extra-daily body a *dilated* body,

"a hot body, but not in the emotional or sentimental sense. [...] The dilated body is above all a glowing body, in the scientific sense of the term: the particles which make up daily behaviour have been excited and produce more energy, they have undergone an increment of motion, they move further apart, attract and oppose each other with more force..." (Barba & Savarese, 1991, p. 54).

At work in the dilated body is a balance of opposing tensions, a 'dance of opposites'. Where in the daily body, spatial extension and withdrawal work one at a time, in the extra-daily body they work simultaneously.

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<sup>29</sup> The concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (German 'alienation effect') is often said to originate in the work of the German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht who in his pursuit of theatre was keen for the spectator to remain consciously critical and uninvolved in the play, favouring intellectual engagement over emotional involvement. As Nascimento (2009) points out, however, Brecht himself got the idea of alienation from witnessing a performance by the Chinese actor Mei Lan Fang in Moscow in 1935. Thus whilst Brecht coined the term *Verfremdungseffekt*, his idea is really "nothing but a hybrid product of Western and Eastern acting principles and styles" (p. 77).

“The Japanese term which describes this opposing tension is *hippari hai* which means ‘to pull something or someone towards oneself while the other person or thing is trying to do the same’. *Hippari hai* is found between the upper and the lower parts of the actor’s body, as well as between the front and back. There is also *hippari hai* between the actors and the musicians, who in fact do not play in unison but try to move away from each other, alternately surprising each other, interrupting each other’s tempo, yet not going so far apart as to lose the contact, the particular bond which puts them in opposition” (ibid, p. 12).

The extra-daily body of the performer is a body re-built for scenic fiction, which oscillates between different energy poles. The Balinese speak of a continuous interweaving of *manis* and *keras*. “*Keras* means strong, hard, vigorous. *Manis* means delicate, soft, tender. *Keras* and *manis* can be applied to various movements and positions of different parts of the body in a dance...” (ibid).

In their exploration of the extra-daily body in codified performance traditions, Barba and Savarese come to the conclusion that codification essentially helps to change the performer’s physical attitude, freeing him/ her from the automatism of the daily body and thus bringing about a qualitative change of energy which increases the performer’s presence. Such descriptions remind of the processes of de-automatisation described earlier in relation to Artaud and Surrealism, albeit here de-automatisation is achieved not by playful loosening of motor behaviour and mental habits but by a rigorous re-education of the bodymind. I would like to suggest that codified performance styles demand *contemplation in action*, and that the performer’s complex psychophysical score leads to heightened attention and awareness, just as Deikman (1966) suggests is the case in contemplative practice.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

### **Actor training at Odin**

The early years of Eugenio’s theatrical research and productions were marked by an intense actor training regime at Odin, not unlike the one which Eugenio had encountered in Opole. Initially the training consisted of jazz ballet, gymnastics, Hatha Yoga and pantomime. Eugenio also introduced acrobatic exercises, such as shoulder stands, head stands and body flips which he had learned in Opole, as well as exercises adapted from Kathakali training. Whilst Eugenio was present at almost every training session for the first decade of Odin’s existence, observing and giving advice to the actors, by the mid-1970s he began to withdraw from the training studio, leaving the responsibility for skill acquisition and developmental process to the individual actors who shared skills with each other. According to Watson (1993) during this time the group’s attention crucially shifted from psycho-physical research to the exploration

of “the root source of all physical and vocal expression, energy. This shift in focus meant that the actors were now more concerned with the technical problems of how to control their physical and vocal instruments, in order to engage and give expression to their energy, than with the quasi-psychological connections between an imagined stimulus and the response it elicits” (p. 57).

Whilst Grotowski was conducting his Theatre of Sources research, embarking on expeditions around the world, Odin’s actors also travelled to study performance traditions with which they were unfamiliar: Two actors remained in Denmark to study ballroom dancing, one actress travelled to Haiti to research voodoo, another actor went to India to study Kathakali. Three more actors travelled to Bali to learn Baris and Legong. Due to Eugenio’s own interests, Odin’s training approach already bore resemblances to Asian performance training (for example, the actors explored body composition at great length, working with the balance of opposites and tensions; they also worked with exercises exploring the alignment of the spine), and so the journeys to Bali and India made the biggest impact upon the subsequent training.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

## The Inner Work of the Odin Actor

### Roberta Carreri

Roberta Carreri became aware of Odin in early 1973 when she saw a performance of *My Father's House* which the company had toured to Italy. The performance deeply touched her and she returned to witness a training demonstration with actors Iben Nagel Rasmussen and Jens Christensen the following day.

"I felt a great coherence in what they were doing. I felt that there were people who were doing what they were saying. And this was very important, crucial for me at the time, after the slow death of the 68 ideals. People were talking very much in the radical left but doing very little. So, to me these people seemed more honest. [...] And what I saw there at Odin Teatret was that there was this equality between women and men. That was very relieving. It was proof to me that the dreams could become a reality" (Roberta, my interview, lines 22 - 29).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

Roberta vividly recalls her early training experiences with the company. Training took place over long hours and was rigorous and exhausting. Moreover, once the company returned to Denmark Roberta was a long way from home, away from friends and family and in a new country, the language of which was unfamiliar to her. She describes losing her old identity and having to craft a new one.

"I was not a well trained person at all. All the process of the training was very painful for me, physically, but also mentally. I came into a Danish group, they spoke a language that I did not understand, they did things that I could not do and nobody knew me. So, I lost my language, I lost my identity, and I lost the ability to walk and move because I could not move as they did. So, at the age of twenty I had to start to learn how to walk, how to speak, and how to create a history, my own history inside the group, my own identity. I knew what my identity was in Milan where I came from, I had my aunt, I had my family, my friends, telling me who I was - but there I was starting from scratch. It was a kind

of existential suicide to join Odin. When I say existential suicide it is because my body didn't die but my identity died. And like a phoenix I had to be born from my own ashes. So that is what you see know, a phoenix" (Roberta, my interview, lines 95 - 105).

Roberta describes her new identity as one which arose from her creative actions. "Our actions are our children, for better or worse. Thus, when I identify myself with my actions, it is in them that I find my strength. In presenting them to others I reaffirm my own identity" (in Nascimento, 2009, p. 155). However, the development of her professional identity took time. Before joining Odin, Roberta had been studying at university and she was accustomed to intellectual learning. Odin's working methods challenged her to "learn and comprehend with the skin, the nerves, the muscles, and the bones of my body" (ibid, p. 152). Roberta persevered and slowly she was able to integrate intellectual ideas of actor training into the domain of her inner experience.

"...It started to happen when my experience started to become a reality, something I could relate to ... when I started to have a little past and when I started to teach other people. Because the moment you have to teach other people you have to formulate your experience - and you get hold of it. You become aware that you have it. This process started about one and a half years after I joined Odin Teatret. I was just thrown into teaching new people and so I had this experience of 'getting hold of what I knew'. And through that I started to relate Eugenio's words to my experience, and that became a very positive growing process. But the first two years were like a sun dance, just a painful experience that you go through in order to be part of the clan" (Roberta, my interview, lines 137 - 145).

Roberta describes her own evolution as an actress of Odin in 'seasons'. "I call them seasons because there is no clear demarcation line separating one period from another. Just as one can perceive the first signs of autumn during a day in August, so in a training phase one can identify the embryo of a new principle: the result of a need that in time will bring us to further development. Even their duration is not the same: some can last two years, others more than ten" (Carreri, 2007, p. 1).

Roberta describes her first season as concerned with achieving embodied presence on stage through exercises taught to her by others, whilst in the second season she developed her own training programme and was challenged to find ways of "crashing" through her own "clichés" (Roberta, my interview, line 228) which had accumulated in her work.

"...working with physical training, you start to develop cliché, ways of behaving that you know that function and that are nice and then you start doing the same over and over again - and this is a trap. The training is a good place where you can break your cliché by taking on new principles, inspiration from other

performers you see, dancers, painters - and you integrate this into your work” (ibid, lines 229 - 233).

In interview with Nascimento (2009), Roberta emphasised the importance of the performer’s individual motivation and perseverance in his/ her individual training. Professional development...

“...can only happen through a daily training in which the actors come to confront themselves with the important time in which nothing seems to happen. In which the actor feels stuck. Only if the actor finds the motivation to continue can he pass through the crisis, and in doing so find himself changed. It is in this process that the actor finds his uniqueness. The only thing he wants is to come out of the grey tunnel he is in. The need to come out will show him the path, and that cannot be but personal. This will not be the result or the fruit of someone else’s work, it will not be a reproduction but something unique. The actor is born out of himself” (p. 159).

In her third season of training Roberta’s focus shifted to the creation of physical scores, i.e. fixed lines of action, with the help of texts, props and music.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

Lastly, in her fourth season of training Roberta began to create her own shows. She felt “moved by a kind of existential necessity that concretises itself in a theme. From this starting point I begin to search for texts, music, objects, clothes, light, and elements of scenography; to create sequences of actions and dances, to construct a montage that has dramaturgical coherence” (Carreri, 2007, p. 1). Roberta regards her solo performance *Judith* which she created in 1987 as a marker of major change in her life. The birth of her daughter Alice in 1981 meant that by 1987 when Alice started going to school Roberta could not tour extensively with Odin, and she had to work on her own and create a solo show to maintain her practice. The creation of *Judith* also meant that Roberta had to take own responsibilities beyond her role as actor of the show. She had to produce it and advertise it. It gave her the true sense that “I was Odin Teatret, too” (Roberta, my interview, line 323) and “a completely new world opened up for me” (ibid, lines 326 - 327).

## **Meetings with Japanese traditions**

Roberta's own training and professional development was greatly enhanced by meetings and training with Japanese performers Katsuko Azuma (a Nihon Buyo dancer) and Natsu Nakajima (a Butoh dancer). Roberta met Katsuko Azuma at the 1980 ISTA session in Bonn. She recalls a lesson with Azuma in which she had to feel a vertical line

"... that began from the soft spot of my head and arrived at the coccyx, passing through 'a small steel ball covered with velvet that rested in my belly, under the navel.' At that point, after six years of work at the Odin Teatret I had acquired a fairly good amount of physical intelligence. I could clearly perceive the movement of different parts of the body without the need to look at them. But that internal part that Katsuko Azuma was speaking about was completely unknown to me. It took me months to identify it, and suddenly, from that day on, my stage presence changed greatly" (in Nascimento, 2009, p. 157).

It was during her work with Japanese dance that Roberta began to truly feel her body from the inside.

"The basic posture of Noh Theatre dance and Nihon Buyo dance is a complex architecture of inner tension that was completely new for me to find, because I always had been used to think about the body as something that I could see, arms, legs, torso, head. But this suddenly made me feel my body from the inside, the spine which I now call the snake..." (Roberta, my interview, lines 309 - 313).

Training in Nihon Buyo and Butoh which required Roberta to sustain action and gaze in slow motion also helped her to keep breaking out of her performative clichés. "The characters that we have performed for years and years (Judith since 1987) cling to me like parasites from which it is hard to free myself ... because they work" (in Nascimento, 2009, p. 159). Roberta asserts that she never had the intention of becoming a Nihon-Buyo or a Butoh dancer. Instead, she is fascinated by the internal dynamics of each form, "that which is 'invisible' but which determines the level of perception. That which happens inside the body of the actor-dancer. But to learn the 'invisible,' one needs to go through the 'visible': the form. For this I have learned choreographed dance pieces from my masters" (ibid, p. 160).

## **On the relationship between actor and spectator**

Roberta describes actor training and rehearsal at Odin as a solitary experience. One works alone, sometimes alongside others who are pursuing their own training. In contrast, performance offers the presence of the other.



“...another ‘I’ is definitely very important. To the focus. Sometimes it is disturbing, it feels disturbing if other people watch the training - but I will never think that they disturb a performance. We have been showing the training and sometimes it has been good and sometimes it has been less good. Because the training is a very intimate moment where you are allowed to fail, where you are allowed to do things wrong while in the performance you are not allowed to fail” (Roberta, my interview, lines 246 - 252).

To Roberta, performance is a meeting of actor and spectator in which a circle of attention and energy is established. The spectator offers his/her attention to which Roberta responds.

“I feel the energy of a spectator. I feel the presence of the spectator, I feel the silence of the spectator and that is the most beautiful thing to feel, the silence of 200 people. It’s incredibly strong, these are the blessed moments in a performance, where you really feel you have the public in your hand because they listen, they are silent. It’s a moment of great lightness. And at the same time of great density” (ibid, lines 278 - 282).

### **On working with presence**

Roberta believes that a performer’s primary task is to be present in the moment. “...being completely present in the moment, in what you do, it’s one of the biggest aims for me in training, to train the actor to be present in the moment, to be completely present in the action and at the same time to be completely open to what is happening around him or her” (ibid, lines 81 - 84). She suggests that performers ought to be like children who are naturally present in action. As children “...we were our body, we were not what we were saying, we were what we were doing” (ibid, line 94). Referring to the practice of acrobatics, Roberta describes how Odin’s training approach enhanced the presence of its actors.

“In the process of learning them, the body and mind must be one: if one thinks of other matters whilst performing an acrobatic exercise, it is highly probable that one falls and hurts oneself. That is why I like to say that the floor has been my first zen teacher: it awoke me each and every time I lost my concentration. [...] The sustained rhythm with which we worked was aimed at overcoming mental blocks, and thus also physical ones, caused by fear. Once a series of exercises was learnt, we moved on to improvising their sequence and to execute them using different dynamics. When we felt secure enough, we would do them on the wooden floor without the protection of the mat, thus moving in various directions in the space. The fact that there were several people on the floor led us to be careful and to react to the sudden appearance of a colleague in front of you, changing direction at the last instant. Collisions could be painful. This controlled risk was, for me, an essential element of one aspect of training” (Carreri, 2007, p. 2).

In his work within Odin, Eugenio uses two terms which capture the essence of Odin's 'method': *Kraft* (German, 'physical might' or 'force'; the word relates to the Old English for 'craft', meaning 'skill') and *sats* (a word which Barba, 1995, suggests is of Norwegian origin and means 'impulse' or 'preparation'). *Sats* "indicates [...] the moment in which one is ready to act, the instant which precedes the action, when all the energy is already there, ready to intervene, but as if suspended, still held in the fist, a tiger-butterfly about to take flight" (Barba, 1995, p. 40). In theatre anthropology *sats* is energy suspended in immobility, it is the extra-daily body, the decided body ready for action.

"There is a muscular, nervous and mental commitment, already directed towards an objective. It is the tightening or the gathering together of oneself from which the action departs. [...] The performer knows how to distinguish the *sats* from the gesticulatory inertia in which movements roll over each other without internal power. The *sats* engages the entire body" (ibid, p. 56).

Roberta recalls how in acrobatic exercises as well as exercises with sticks (which involved avoiding being hit by jumping or ducking) "the precision of *sats* and the rapidity of reflexes were indispensable conditions" (Carreri, 2007, p. 2). Roberta also recalls learning positions and walks from fellow actor Iben Nagel Rasmussen which fostered the performer's presence in the body.

"One of them was called the 'samurai'. The presence of samurai, like that of swordsmen, is characterised by the fact that every one of their movements is full of that extra-ordinary presence typical of moments of risk. They are alert. They are present. They are in *sats* position. But they can react adequately only if they are not blocked by fear" (ibid, pp. 2 - 3).

Looking back, Roberta recalls that after four years of training, she began to notice a change in her inner experience as performer. "It felt like the action was carrying me, instead of me carrying the action" (Roberta, my interview, lines 170 - 171). Today, after 36 years of practice Roberta describes her scenic presence as a state of 'openness' and 'emptiness'.

"...it's to be completely empty before coming on stage. I completely open and then I know what I have to do, I don't have to think about that. My body knows it. What I think about ... I don't think. I react. I react to what the colleague does, I react to the music. So, for me today to be present is to have gone through a long rehearsal period where all the knowledge has been embodied, where all the scores have been embodied - and then be completely empty, to not remember anything before coming on the stage. And when I am in I just react..." (ibid, lines 158 - 164).

When she is in this state of emptiness Roberta feels that time flies. "Sometimes I have been performing and at the end I have the strange feeling that I just started. What? This is the end?"

It's like the time just zipped away" (ibid, lines 180 - 181). Despite being deeply immersed, Roberta remembers every detail of her performances, because she works with fixed scores of actions. She never completely loses herself on stage.

"...in Odin Teatret we work always in scores. One thing is if you make an improvisation and then you lose yourself, you don't remember what you've been doing. Another thing is when you have a score which is fixed. But you have done it so many times so that you don't have to think about that anymore. But you know, you're body knows what to do. It's like when you're dancing Tango - you know the steps but you don't think 123, 123 anymore. You react to your partner ... the steps guide you and all that ... and you react to your partner's impulse. It's exactly the same. Which means that you don't think anymore about the steps but you can remember what you were doing" (ibid, lines 197 - 204).

### **On scores of actions, mindfulness and automatism in the actor's work**

Roberta describes a 'score of actions' as a "skeleton", a structure upon which the "flesh" (ibid, line 209) of each performance is put. When Roberta develops a new score it initially has its own meaning.

"It's a series of actions that you memorise, either by starting from an improvisation or starting through composition. But then this score, this sequence of actions, will be used in relation to another person, and then the action has to be tuned to get a meaning in relation to the situation that your character is living in front of the others" (ibid, lines 221 - 225).

Thus, once the score is embodied, the actor's intention grows out of the context of the performance, it does no longer precede the score.

"You have to interpret the score... an action has to change in meaning according to the context in which it's put. It is not a dance - but action and reaction. The action has an intention, to show your impatience, to show your love, the actions are not empty structures. You are creating a painting with your body, your eyes, you show your love also in other ways. So you use the score to show your love" (ibid, lines 213 - 217).

Roberta asserts that it is the mind which moves the body, "Without the mind the body is a sack of bones and flesh and fat. [...] It's what makes you feel alive" (ibid, lines 343 - 344). Roberta regards the mind as the "wiser" part of herself, as "something that is even without my will. [...] I think that my mind is something other than my thoughts" (ibid, lines 356 - 359). When working on a new score, Roberta asserts it feels artificial at first. Her head has to tell her body what to do - until the score has been assimilated. Roberta believes that once a score

has become embodied and she no longer needs to think about it she can reach a place of great vitality when performing the score - but there is always the opposite risk of automatised behaviour, that is action without inner awareness, "you start feeling that your body does it, without feeling that your mind is with it" (ibid, lines 346 - 347). Roberta asserts that at the critical point of having embodied a score to the point of forgetting it one must stay alive and aware. It is then that Roberta can most efficiently use the score to relate and respond to her environment and to the other actors.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

## Julia Varley

British born actress Julia Varley joined Odin Teatret in 1976. At the time she was living in Milan, Italy, where she was an activist of Avanguardia Operaia (workers' avant-garde), one of the groups of the revolutionary Left. Making theatre was Julia's way of supporting the students' and workers' struggle (Varley, 2011). Through the local theatre collective, Teatro del Drago she became involved in the organisation of cultural activities in Milan, as part of which she organised a barter and a workshop with Odin. Following the initial encounter Julia felt compelled to join Odin for three months in Denmark, in order to return and share her knowledge with her theatre colleagues in Milan. However, during her time with Odin Julia realised that "I knew nothing, that everything I had done before was based on enthusiasm, words, ideology - but that I had no real experience" (Julia, my interview, line 15 - 17). Every day with Odin, her old and secure identity as a responsible and politically active artist grew weaker, she was "confronted with her "professional ignorance" and she "felt the ground disappear" from beneath her feet (Varley, 2011, p. 13).

"I went from being someone very responsible and very active to nobody. I was nobody. And I had the knowledge of being nobody, so I couldn't go back and be responsible for other people, knowing that you are nobody. You can do that when you don't know ... you can play on enthusiasm until you're conscious that you don't know anything ... but when you have that knowledge it's impossible. So, I couldn't go back" (Julia, my interview, lines 53 - 57).

Like Roberta, the only thing Julia could do was to stay with Odin. She joined Odin as an apprentice adopted by Tage Larsen. It took eighteen months of training under Tage, as well as other 'elders' of the ensemble, before Julia was accepted as a member of the group by Eugenio.

## **On training, bodily intelligence & subjective knowing**

Julia describes how the evolution of her physical training has gone through stages similar to those depicted by Roberta. The first stage was concerned with receiving, as well as inventing exercises, which could foster her scenic presence. "...you've got someone looking at you most of the time and you're learning to discover what presence is" (ibid, lines 82 - 83). Julia recalls gaining an important insight into the actor's way of working with the body when creating an improvisation for Eugenio in 1980: suddenly she recognised the intelligence of the body.

"Now it would take me two minutes to explain to somebody, you're doing training because you learn to be present and then with that you're creating your roles, your characters, your material for the performance - BUT it had taken me four years to understand that. And to actually realise that all the work that I had done in the training was to find a thought, or what I would call an intelligence of the body which is then fundamental for doing everything else" (ibid, lines 90 - 94).

Julia describes the practical application of the body's intelligence in training, rehearsal and performance as a "way of thinking which is not in the head but which is in the cells" (ibid, lines 100 - 101).

"...the cells in my body are thinking and they are passing on knowledge, one to the other. One can also call it intuition but the word intuition is like tied to something else. It is like you use an intelligence which comes from experience - but experience that you don't remember with your head. So, you're not conscious about it. It decides and so if people ask me, 'Why do you choose that song?' ... Afterwards I can usually explain ... but usually the choice comes because it's my actor's intelligence that decides. And afterwards I can explain - but in this explanation there is a bit of a trick" (ibid, lines 105 - 111).

In speaking of the intelligence of the body Julia is hesitant to use psychological language. She is not interested in psychological analysis, therapy or self-discovery. "...they are very distant from my way of thinking" (ibid, line 124). Julia works with the intelligence of the body, she trusts the process of physical impulses from which intentions and emotions arise.

"...during the time of *Oxyrhincus* I was working with positions in the face. And at one moment I had my eyes going down and my nose going up - and this immediately gives you a feeling of snobbism. Then I tried the opposite: My eyes going up and my nose going down, and there you are subdued, you're under ... and what I enjoy about the actor's work is that by letting your body think you discover. And so it's not that I have decided, 'Oh, I'm going to make a subdued piece', it's more that I am working on the oppositions and I find this, I discover it. And then it's fascinating because you find something that you didn't know, or

maybe that your body-mind knew but that you didn't know with your awareness" (ibid, lines 126 - 133).

Julia describes acting as involving a process of inner opening and trusting that the right material will arise. When Julia commences work on a performance or a lecture or an article she doesn't know where it will take her, but she feels comfortable in the unknown territory.

"And this trust in a process of this kind where you know how to proceed but you don't know what will come out comes from the work as an actor, from the training, from the work on performances that I don't think another person would have. It's like other people need to be much more secure about where they are going and what will happen, what they're aiming at" (ibid, lines 142 - 146).

In the second stage of her training, Julia discovered ways of articulating her experience and passing it on, through writing and direction. During this time she started working on the Magdalena Project which celebrates the work of women in the performing arts. It was at this time that Julia came to believe profoundly in the authority of her embodied experience, "not accepting any longer that something is true objectively but relying on the subjective experience" (ibid, lines 157 - 158), and she strove to give voice to the subjective and the personal within academia.

"I feel it is a woman's contribution to the world. To give importance to the subjective, the personal. So to not have to acquire a way of thinking which belongs to the establishment, belongs to the academy, to the male tradition ... but to discover something else. And so all the training has become that place where I have the privilege of asking questions and not necessarily getting answers. To be able to keep on asking questions ... that is something that I have noticed at the Odin, for instance, that the women have kept on training. The men have stopped. Why have they stopped? After they have learned there is no more need. They learn, acquire a tool and then the training is just to see 'if they are able to' while for all the women at the Odin it has always been a way of taking you there where you don't know, of discovering, of being curious" (ibid, lines 170 - 179).

### **On giving voice to vulnerability**

Julia shares with me that once she had "big problems" (ibid, line 185) with her voice. "I had moments in which I couldn't talk on the telephone, I couldn't talk to someone sitting beside me in a car because my voice would start cracking. And I had been to phonotherapists and neurologists" (ibid, lines 185 - 187). Julia describes that in the end she realised that she needed to follow her intuition, to go back to herself, to trust her voice.

“And it was there it started becoming strong. It was at that moment that ... lots of people came to me and asked me, “I want to work with you on voice,” and I said to them “You’re crazy, that’s my weakest point.” But because I had all the difficulties I invented a lot of ways of working with the voice which were useful for me, and then I was much more able to hear also, and guide others, because of the difficulties” (ibid, lines 190 - 195).

Julia recalls a meeting of the Magdalena Project in Peru, where many women expressed that they had no voice, that they couldn’t express themselves.

“And they just cried. One of them said, ‘Yes, but I don’t want to become like a man. I don’t want to be strong like a man.’ And there for me, putting it together with my experiences as an actor, what I want to give value to is the vulnerability. It’s about you being strong because you offer your vulnerability - and not because you are strong strong. I mean also technically. Of course, as an actor you can be technically very prepared and so you’re able to go on stage and it’s not a problem. But where it really becomes magic for me is where you offer what you don’t know, what you feel insecure about or where your technique is there to help you just be human” (ibid, lines 201 - 208).

Starting the Magdalena Project and giving voice to women in the performing arts has empowered Julia and strengthened her own identity within Odin Teatret. Today, Julia has many priorities and commitments besides acting. She directs performances and festivals, she writes, she is editor of the Open Page and she takes on a lot of organisational responsibilities for Odin. She has contemplated giving up acting - but she knows that she “will miss contact with that special intelligence that is what guides me in everything else I do. And so I keep on going...” (ibid, lines 222 - 223).

### **On presence**

Reflecting further on presence, Julia describes it as “breathing of the cells” (ibid, line 243). Julia uses the metaphor of breath because she perceives movement in presence: outward movement, into the world beyond the body, and inward movement, returning and receiving.

We explore presence in the actor’s work with physical actions. Julia asks me to pick up a piece of paper, then to pretend picking it up, playing “as if”. Then she asks me a second time to pick up the real paper, this time paying attention to my back. Afterwards follows a second “as if” during which I also place my attention on my back. - Julia tells me that on my first “as if” nothing happened in my back, whilst on the second round I became overly stiff, putting too much effort into engaging my back. I pick up the real piece of paper once more. “Do you feel that there is a very small, tiny engagement, like a small explosion ... that’s what it is, that’s



presence. It's how you discover the action, and that is connected to your back, your spine" (ibid, lines 267 - 269). Real actions involve the entire body. "...if I really have to do something, my back is immediately engaged. So, that's how you find that engagement, even if you're doing actions which are just theatrical. It's how you find the real in the fiction" (ibid, lines 274 - 276). Actors are challenged to do the action, not to try, not to pretend, but to do, really do, whatever action is required of their character. It must be real.

"If you're just doing the movement it's your head that is dominating - and that's why when I gave you the awareness of your back, your head said, 'My back must be engaged,' and in fact what you did was become rigid. So, there was a complete separation between your actor's consciousness and the action you needed to do. That is what happens to the young actors in *Ur-Hamlet*. They have the consciousness in their head, and they try to create it with their body, trying to be expressive, and you end up doing a whole lot of things which are not useful. They are not needed for the action. BUT on the other hand, to just do what is needed is very difficult. It needs the years of training to understand it in your body" (ibid, lines 281 - 289).

Years of training develop the actor's tacit knowledge. It is experience which can hardly be explained in books and only really be fully understood in action, through doing and sensing the body. Julia describes the process of learning a score of actions as progressive embodiment. Initially, it requires a lot of attention: "when I still don't dominate it I have to be careful about the rhythms, of where I am, the texts I have to say, the timing and so on" (ibid, lines 307 - 308). Then Julia reaches a point when the score becomes automatic and requires less conscious effort, but it's not yet free. "It's not yet at the point where the performance starts speaking to you because you are no longer preoccupied with it" (ibid, lines 310 - 311). At this stage, Julia emphasises that "I need to engage myself to be engaged" (ibid, line 315). Finally, after having performed the score often enough, it facilitates a different kind of flow within the performer. It leads to a place where "you no longer know" (ibid, lines 316 - 317). Julia describes that at this point in the embodiment of a score its performance becomes a multi-levelled experience which crucially involves the spectator.

"...your body can think of many things at the same time. You don't need to be thinking of just one thing. And again, it's women and the body: women are trained to think of five things at the same time. [...] And in the performance you do that at another level, in the sense that you do that also through the eyes of the spectator. You also connect with all the other eyes ... and that is why I say, I'm not so interested in 'introspection' and 'knowing who I am' ... it's not that I'm interested in knowing who the spectator is, but what I am interested in is what happens in-between us. What is that ... like solid air ... that can change me and change the spectator. So, you're really concentrating on that solid air which is in-between" (ibid, lines 324 - 335).

## **On the actor's and spectator's relationship**

Julia describes the relationship of actor and spectator as one that can spark a profound sense of togetherness, of communication. "...you are bringing together the experience of the actor and the experience of the spectator. And at moments these two experiences touch each other. And then something changes..." (ibid, lines 344 - 345). Julia likens the actor-spectator exchange to synchronicities which have occurred in her life: uncanny connections between seemingly unrelated events which lend another level of meaning to her experience. Julia suggests that the word 'communication' is too banal to capture this very special dynamic of the actor-spectator relationship. "In reality communication is used to say that we understand each other. And often one doesn't understand - it's just that something has touched you so that you are moved. You're no longer in that place, you're in another place" (ibid, lines 347 - 349). I offer the word 'communion', however Julia feels that it is too peaceful.

"...the experience can be hard. It can be something that disturbs you, that you refuse, that you don't want to know about. But it really depends on these two experiences finding that common word or common colour ... that makes it 'click' and suddenly you understand something for yourself. [...] Where, what, why ... you probably don't know. And maybe in ten years time something will happen and you will suddenly know why" (ibid, lines 353 - 358).

## **On the magic of opposition**

Julia highlights that theatre has a magical quality: it thrives on contradiction, it grows out of the union of opposites. In the world 'out there' contradictions and opposition tend to give rise to conflict, "creating wars, barriers, walls" (ibid, line 230). In theatre on the other hand, contradiction is recognised as the spark of creativity.

"In theatre, the contradiction, the opposition is what makes you creative. It is what gives meaning to your performances. And that is where I think we have a much bigger responsibility as actors in this world, because we know that opposites can be contained in one action, and we know that different stories, different opinions can be in the same action. So, I can be working with people with whom, if I just had to meet on the level of ideas, I could disagree totally - but in the performance we find a meeting place" (ibid, lines 230 - 236).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

## **Eugenio Barba: The director on the actor's craft**

Eugenio believes that the actor's path ought to involve both professional and personal growth, or "individuation" (Eugenio, my interview, line 20). The prerequisite for such growth, Eugenio asserts, is humility.

"In the training, in the education and preparation of the actor there should be humility which corresponds with how to build a feeling through a meeting with something which is bigger than you. Anything you are doing is bigger than you are. Therefore, all the time I speak of mothers giving birth to a child which they have to protect, it is not an expression of yourself, it comes from you but really the child does not belong to you" (ibid, lines 25 - 30).

Like a mother giving birth to her child, an actor must birth his performance score, and take care of it but also surrender it, for he has no control over the impact it creates within the other performers or the spectator. Eugenio suggests that it is the craft of the actor which enables him to "face, to experience, to sense something bigger than yourself" (line 43) and

"The other is not only the spectator - but also the other within you! That part which lives in exile - which is a sort of image I have of the concrete reality I have which is within me, which leads me, prompts me to do certain things, I don't know. I don't know why when I see certain things, I read certain things I start crying ... conceptually, intellectually I am not aware, I am not able to explain it - but I suppose it is this part of me which concealed inside" (ibid, lines 44 - 49).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

Eugenio is very hesitant to speak of the actor's path in spiritual terms, "it's very dangerous to speak to actors like this, because already there is so much rhetoric. Already the actors have the feeling they are expressing the self ... self-expression or something very important" (ibid, lines 58 - 60). As such, Eugenio believes that spiritual terminology can lead to a lack of humility and to inflated self-importance. Instead, Eugenio describes using a terminology of the craft, emphasizing the actor as artisan who works on his score as a potter works on clay, or a carver on a piece of wood. "And then, if I should be very presumptuous, and use big words I'd say that it has to do with a sort of path which you were mentioning before which is connected to Karma Yoga which is the yoga of the path of action" (ibid, lines 65 - 67). In Hinduism Karma Yoga is the discipline of selfless action (e.g. Bowker, 1997). It advocates the detachment from the fruits of all deeds in the strive for union with the Supreme Divine. Eugenio also makes reference to Hatha Yoga, "physical forms which you are attaining, achieving, reaching them which permits personal growth - but at the same time permits a sort of gratification for the

spectator and a certain self-exploration for the spectator” (Eugenio, my interview, lines 385 - 387).

### **On the actor's Via Negativa**

Reflecting on the ideas of a 'Via Negativa' and 'Sunyata' in the actor's training, rehearsal and performance, Eugenio warns of presumptuousness.

“I would say that it is very subjective, the feeling of emptiness, what is it, being empty ... we cannot compare it to the emptiness of which the Buddhists are speaking, Nagarjuna, I mean, it would be very presumptuous. So, let's say that when we have a feeling of emptiness it means that ... hm, in a way I feel empty now because I am very concentrated on what I am doing now, answering your questions, so emptiness is more that no other things are disturbing you, they are not mixing with what you are trying to concentrate upon. So, there are many ways of interpreting this word sunyata” (ibid, lines 391 - 397).

I share with Eugenio how one of the musicians of the ensemble, the Indian flutist and singer Annanda Prasanna Pattanaik, described to me that “he becomes the music when he sings” (ibid, line 402). Eugenio suggests that when playing as part of the larger ensemble Annanda is not simply 'becoming music', he is also “becoming part of a flow” (ibid, lines 423) in which he has to adapt and respond to the other performers and to Eugenio who as director is “manipulating the flow, just like orchestrating different instruments, melodies” (ibid, lines 427). Eugenio regards his own responsibility as one of “preserving, safe-guarding their [the performers', JB] diversity - but making them become something which transports and carries the spectator somewhere else. [...] My image, my nearest parallel ... is that of a surgeon. You are operating ... and a few centimetres decide if you are killing or not” (ibid, lines 429 - 432).

Eugenio regards the Via Negativa as a beautiful metaphor, the practical application of which is misunderstood. “If you have to learn something you don't start by taking things away from you. You wear thought ... how to dance in a certain way, how to move, so what Grotowski is saying there is a sort of beautiful paradox - but it does not apply when you work” (ibid, lines 461 - 463). Eugenio suggests that what needs to be stripped away is one's own personal cliché which generally manifests as one's initial spontaneous choices.

“I would say that what we have to take away is [...] our way of behaving automatically, this is our spontaneity. And then start estranging it. [...] Via Negativa, the taking away ... yes, you can say you take away the way I usually walk - but then you have to acquire something else. Via negativa as expressed by Grotowski was in part true - if I work and I find I have an impediment, then I try to take away this impediment. But I would say that all the education, the training is

fundamental. The psycho-somatic training of the actor consists of acquiring new habits. You can take away the old ways, but you find new ways.” (ibid, lines 463 - 472).

In reflection on the idea of Via Negativa Eugenio reminds me of giving primacy to my own inner experience.

“Think of your own process. Remember when you read about these concepts which are so beautiful we say, “Oh yes, fantastic, Via Negativa,” but then think of your own experience. Always think of what I know, what I know - not what is known” (ibid, lines 474 - 476).

### **On the value of the spectator**

In contrast to Grotowski, Eugenio has always rooted his work within the theatrical paradigm. When Grotowski departed into his post-theatrical research, Eugenio remained loyal to the actor-spectator relationship.

“When you work with the technique you work on yourself first as an actor, and then the results of this process will also have an impact on the spectator. So, Grotowski just concentrated on this part of the impact on himself and then he made it explicit that here lies its merit [...] the main difference between Grotowski and me is that for me theatre is interesting only because there is the spectator. For me, theatre is the spectator; in order to reach the spectator I have to work with actors” (ibid, lines 86 - 94).

Eugenio regards his directorial work which interfaces him with the spectator as a practice which demands him to “think in a very paradoxical way” (ibid, line 99). There is no such thing as ‘the spectator’. Instead there are many individuals, many facets of perception, many beliefs, many ways of grasping the unfolding drama, which are present at any one performance.

“...this multiple, this plurality of spectators who are really very concrete in their reactions and responses ... obliges me to concentrate on my actions like a meditation. This is what it is like from an auditing point of view. Everything is form. Everything we think, we imagine is always dressed in forms. Words, colours, sounds. [...] The spectator is for me the factor who obliges me to concentrate and discover many new things in what I have already found, he is the decisive factor for exploration...” (ibid, lines 109 - 116).

In his directorial interaction with the spectator, Eugenio is driven by the concern to create a disturbing experience for the spectator. “Not a sort of provocation but more a moment of ‘Is

this really what is happening in my life?" (ibid, lines 134 - 135). Eugenio likens this disturbance to a *Verfremdungseffekt*: "One of the main problems in the actor's work with any artist's work is how to estrange what the spectators, the reader, the viewer knows ... not to the point that it becomes bizarre and then you say, 'Yeah, this person is crazy.' To estrange to a point where it evokes association in the spectator" (ibid, lines 238 - 241). Eugenio believes that performers from codified traditions are much more able to engage spectators in this way than performers who have been trained in theatre schools which try to enable them to "build a sort of intellectual, psychological justification" (ibid, line 234) for their role. Intellectual approaches run the danger of keeping the actor and the spectator within what they know.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

As such, theatrical approaches which build on the entirety of the bodymind will have a more profound impact on the spectator than those which only attempt to engage the intellect. In all of his own productions Eugenio aims to achieve this deep engagement, a "deep tsunami" (ibid, line 267) within the spectator.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.1 for full material\*

To the actor, Eugenio asserts, the spectator makes an enormous difference.

"The gaze of the other is a sort of judgement. And one feels judged. The only animal who cannot be looked upon by human being without feeling embarrassed is the human animal. We can look at a cow or dog and it will not be affected in its behaviour by our gaze. But if you sit in a café or on a bench and a man or a woman start looking at you ... you would feel upset. Your behaviour would change. This is one of the characteristics of theatre. There are human beings who expose themselves to the other gaze" (ibid, lines 437 - 443).

Eugenio suggests that the gaze of the spectator provokes a reaction.

"...unwillingly you start adapting. You start trying to tell something to this gaze. If you like it or not. [...] You have performances where the actors play the same structure, the same score - and nevertheless there is something different. Sometimes there are people they really dislike and then you can perceive it - I can because I know because I see them every evening" (ibid, lines 447 - 451).

Reduced cluster depiction. For the full document please see Appendix K.2.

# PARATHEATRICAL RESEARCH

## *Theatre as Alchemy*

*“When individuals choose to interact amongst themselves from a higher commitment to vertical integrity, conditions are primed for witnessing and engaging the miraculous. When this occurs, a unity prevails that doesn’t negate individuation but allows for its simultaneous unfolding as a kind of miraculous interaction of self-governing bodies...”*

*Antero Alli (<http://www.paratheatrical.com/orientation.html>)*

The following cluster depiction is based on my practical immersion in the approach of Antero Alli in ParaTheatrical ReSearch from March to June 2006 (see Alchemy Diary, **APPENDIX F.1**), as well as on Antero’s writings on his website [www.paratheatrical.com](http://www.paratheatrical.com) and in his book *Towards an Archeology of the Soul* (2003), and lastly on four interviews I conducted with members of the collective, as follows:

- ✓ Antero Alli, founder of ParaTheatrical ReSearch (**APPENDIX F.2**)
- ✓ Nick Walker, long-standing member of ParaTheatrical ReSearch (**APPENDIX F.3**)
- ✓ JoJo Razor, past member of ParaTheatrical ReSearch (**APPENDIX F.4**)
- ✓ John Chung, newcomer who participated in The Alchemy Laboratory (**APPENDIX F.5 & F.6**)

Participants of *The Alchemy Laboratory*, June 2006. Photo: Jessica Bockler.

## Antero Alli & ParaTheatrical ReSearch

No one profession captures the creative journey of 56-year old writer, performer, theatre director and film maker Antero Alli. Born in Finland in 1952 and brought up in Toronto, Canada, and Los Angeles, California, Antero's professional path led him from studies with mime artist Keith Berger and explorations of method acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute in LA in the early 1970s, to experimental theatre and video production, to professional astrology practice in the 1980s, to rebellious research into psychotropic drugs, to creative writing in the literary circles of Robert Anton Wilson and Rob Brezsney in the 1990s.

Antero Alli.  
Source: [www.paratheatrical.com](http://www.paratheatrical.com)

Today Antero continues to flow seamlessly from literary exploration, to theatrical expression, to astrological practice, to alternative film production - all of which are grounded in his sincere commitment to ongoing personal explorations in the medium of Paratheatre, though not quite as Jerzy Grotowski had first conceived it in his own work in the 1970s.

I made Antero's acquaintance initially through the internet when researching the theatrical descendents of Jerzy Grotowski and later in person when I visited Berkeley, CA, in the spring of 2006 to participate in one of Antero's paratheatrical laboratories entitled 'The Alchemy Laboratory'. What struck me about Antero was his unwavering commitment to his own path which was informed by his deep and persistent attendance to his internal landscape, his direct experience of the personal and the collective psychophysical realms - or the *horizontal* and *vertical sources*, as he might call them - through paratheatrical rituals. Antero's paratheatrical work which radiates integrity and commitment is one which unfolds underground, in privacy, away from the public eye. Only rarely does it see the light of day, for its purpose is not primarily one of communication but one of unmediated exploration and expression. People access ParaTheatrical ReSearch for a number of reasons: Many people are initially drawn towards the work because it gets them 'high'. "This hedonic motive, however, often disperses after four or five sessions when deeper resistances surface within the body/psyche, demanding a deeper commitment than 'getting high'" (Antero, my interview, lines 1065 - 1067). For some the work becomes a "vehicle for work on the self" (ibid, line 1069), a way "to expose and uproot unwanted behaviour and then, to develop new patterns of response" (ibid, line 1070); for others it offers a way to break through creative blocks; others again see it as a spiritual practice or yoga. Fellow theatre practitioner Matt Mitler from the New York City based ensemble Dzieci describes the paratheatrical Antero as a Sherpa ... "a mountain guide.



He has traversed many paths on the mountain. He has created some of his own paths. [...] His expertise and sense of responsibility makes him a well-trusted guide. [...] Antero has climbed higher than most. He has glimpsed the summit. He knows the direction and his aim is true" (Mittler in Alli, 2003, p. ii). In 2006 I spent over three months with Antero, and I caught but a glimpse of his direction and aims. I hope that the following depiction, mediated through my own lenses, may capture something true to essence of Antero and his work in ParaTheatrical ReSearch.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

## **The Principles of ParaTheatrical Research**

Antero describes ParaTheatrical ReSearch as a skeleton crew of performers, ritualists, vocalists, and dancers who engage with the collective as and when their skills and talents resonate with the unfolding path of projects and laboratories. At the heart of ParaTheatrical ReSearch are group ritual labs which unfold three times a year over a period of two to three months and which are conceived and facilitated by Antero. The labs largely take place indoors, in the privacy of yoga or dance studios. Sessions run two or three times per week and last between three to four hours. As in Grotowski's Paratheatre, the labs feature only performers, or 'doers', and no spectators. Only rarely do they culminate in public demonstrations, performances or films.

### **Purpose of the work**

Antero (Alli, 2009) defines the overall aim of the labs as one concerned with the discovery of individual movements and group movements which trigger "miraculous interactions", that is they invoke and evoke strong visceral resonances that - with skill, practice and commitment - "erupt in spontaneous gestures, patterns of motion, sounds, vocal creations, characterizations" and at more advanced stages of the work choreographies and stories which can be shared with a public audience.

Antero (Alli, 2003) describes the spontaneous expressions which arise within the labs as eruptions from the individuals' - and, more rarely, the collective's - inner landscape or *vertical sources*: "Imagine an overlay of vertical and horizontal sources, or planes of existence; vertical and horizontal. Picture vertical as the invisible sources of energy innate to soul, ancestral karma, dreambody, archetypes, planetary consciousness. Horizontal sources and energies

refer to visible manifestations of our interactions with others, society, political realities, and the out-there world at large” (p. 1).

To Antero, the purpose of the work revolves much around *vertical integrity*, the strengthening of one’s awareness of the vertical sources and the courage to follow their messages and to bring them to fruition. To Antero this means working towards liberating oneself from “decades of socially-conditioned, externally-directed habit patterns” (Alli, 2009) and freeing oneself from the “creations of the conceptual mind to experience life more directly” (ibid).

“As we lose touch with our vertical sources, we lose perspective. Our lives become trivialized in a tangle of meaningless pursuits. We do things without knowing why. We lose track of what is essential to our nature, what matters and what doesn’t. All symptoms of power loss. In an attempt to regain lost ground, we try and assert external control by imposing rigid rules and structures over the spontaneous fluidity of life -- our own and others’ -- resulting in a vain and vicious cycle. Loss of vertical context can also result from over-identification with ideas and images lacking any connection with the realities those concepts supposedly represent; we eat the menu instead of the meal” (ibid).

Antero regards the paratheatrical labs as his path of commitment to his deepest sources of inspiration and the tasks they lay before him. “Paratheatrical rituals are intended to facilitate a more direct experience of the existing conditions of one’s life, regardless of its nature or what you think, feel or fear about it. Imagine the least mediated perception and experience you are personally capable of. This is the experiment, the process and the goal” (ibid).

To Antero engagement with the paratheatrical medium is a spiritual path through which he connects with the deepest crevasses of his inner experience; and the commitment to paying attention, to listening to the revelations of the vertical sources and to giving them the space and time to manifest through creative expression is the silver lining of Antero’s practice.

“...part of the challenge of the medium is to your own integrity ... emotionally and psychologically and spiritually. And so emotional honesty and my integrity as an individual, meaning my ability to commit to and follow through whatever truthful emotional and physical direction develops ... my integrity is tested by my capacity to follow through to the end and not just go half way. [...] Can I follow through what I am participating in all the way to the end of the cycle ... until it turns into another version of itself? And this could be anything from the very small stage of exploring a particular movement that I am unfamiliar with ... to developing a character or a theme through several months of work” (Antero, my interview, lines 78 - 89) and “I find that my artistic development depends on this and that I’m not really able to develop as an artist unless I can bring to fruition every

single direction ... all the way to the end. And then, by outgrowing that direction I'm able to start at a new level and grow" (ibid, lines 96 - 99).

### **Spiritual practice or therapy?**

Antero recognizes that his collaborators may access the labs for reasons other than his own. Some may seek to gain greater self-understanding, some may want to become better performers,

"some people are there for spiritual reasons alone. They come for personal growth reasons. They need to face certain things and the exercises are allowing them some leverage into the subconscious that they could not get on their own. And they don't want to go to a therapist because they want a more active role in their process. And one that tests and encourages their own autonomy" (ibid, lines 496 - 500).

Antero acknowledges that the labs can trigger much psychological work: "Some people come into this work with un-integrated ... or underexposed parental or cultural conditioning ... and that kind of parental or family business is the first thing these people are grappling with" (ibid, lines 208 - 210). He affirms that this was the case for him in the early phases of the work: "I certainly have [...] sorted through quite a bit of my own psychological baggage, my obsessions and fixations and phobias and so forth. And so now, many years later, there are still issues but they don't have the same charge. I don't feel as if they really own me that much as they did when I was younger" (ibid, lines 217 - 221). Overall, one motivation for lab participation is most generally shared: A desire for increased authenticity and spontaneity in creative expression (ibid, lines 62 - 67).

Antero is keen to distinguish his work from therapeutic interventions.

"Paratheatre work can have great therapeutic value. Though it's not the goal. The two things that are the most tested and challenged, are a person's integrity and their autonomy, meaning their capacity for telling the truth to themselves, and their capacity to follow through, and their capacity for playing about and finding their own answers - rather than looking for the teacher to spoon feed them" (ibid, lines 505 - 509).

Comparing paratheatrical rituals to therapy, Antero explains that the phenomenon of transference is utilised in different ways:

"Often in psychotherapy the advancement of insight and progress involves some kind of transference phenomena between the psychotherapist and the patient.

So, that's transference of internal dynamics onto the other person so you can work them out that way. In this work that transference phenomenon is utilised but it's not onto me ... I'm not the psychotherapist. It's the same process of transference or projection of psychic content ... but instead of a person it's projected onto the space before a person that has been designated by a boundary or a circle. And then the person steps into their own projections. To subject themselves to those projections. And by subjecting yourself to your own projections over and over and over again you come to learn a couple of things. 'These are my projections!' and 'This is what it feels like ... and here's what I can learn about myself'" (ibid, lines 511 - 524).

Antero asserts that paratheatrical work encourages a higher degree of autonomy and responsibility within the person.

"People discover that the contents of their subconscious and the archetypes themselves express an autonomous nature, meaning these psychic and psychological dynamics have lives of their own. They are autonomous, they have lives of their own. Complexes have lives of their own. They govern us, for crying out loud. We don't control them. And so as you're interacting with autonomous complexes and dynamics and archetypes even sometimes, with practice you can learn to permit that autonomy. Allow it, instead of trying to control it or own it or something like that. When a dynamic is truly autonomous it's not subject to propriety. It has its own agendas. And so in this work part of the process is learning about the autonomous agendas of our complexes and dynamics, by learning to serve them" (ibid, lines 525 - 535).

According to Antero it is this process of service which encourages individuation: the growth of autonomy and integration within the personality. Antero asserts that work with ParaTheatrical ReSearch is not for everybody because it requires high degrees of self-discipline and responsibility for one's own psychological welfare.

"My role is not as psychotherapist who helps process people's anxiety attacks and emotions but more as a guide to point people to their own direct experience. [...] Whether that experience is difficult or easy, pleasurable or discomforting, the point here is one of me encouraging and challenging your commitment to your own experience which, in turn, provides opportunity to develop your integrity" (Antero in Jessica, Alchemy Diary, session 6).

## Principal Syllabus

### **Caveat: Working with asocial intent**

From the beginning of each lab one of the primary objectives is to enable the performers to cultivate their access to the *vertical sources*. To achieve such cultivation of increased inner awareness, the performers work with an *asocial intent*. The term 'asocial' is not to be confused with 'anti-social' ... rather, it refers to individual and group actions which "bypass socialization processes in lieu of realizing asocial goals such as intimacy with Void, the potential state (No-Form), and active prayer (Source Relations)" (Alli, 2010a). Whilst social intents and actions may satisfy our esteem needs and our needs for love and belongingness, asocial intents and actions aim to "elevate[s] individual integrity and autonomy above the satisfaction of common social needs..." (ibid) to enable the individuals to interact from "a deepening sense of personal sovereignty" (Alli, 2003, p. 4). "By cultivating an asocial climate or spirit, interaction and a group unity can evolve from deepening tolerance and respect for differences, for each individual truth, no matter what its nature" (Alli, 1977). Antero (2003) further asserts that the pledge of each individual to work with asocial intent "minimizes socially ingrained obligations such as seeking or giving assurance, approval or providing unnecessary parental protection or acting out courtship behaviors" (p. 4) and that this agreement minimizes the "tendencies for paratheatrical work to disintegrate into group encounter therapy" (ibid).

To my understanding, actions carried out with asocial intent may indeed create an atmosphere in which our highest need, that of *self-actualisation* (e.g. Maslow, 1971), can be attended to. And indeed, whilst the asocial intent of 'The Alchemy Laboratory' seemed at times somewhat austere, it put me firmly in charge of my own energy and creative states and actions. As such, it enabled me to act from a place of higher integrity and responsibility, whilst following an unpredictable, challenging and yet ultimately rewarding course of action.

### **Sanctifying the Space**

Within all ritual work the preparation of the working space is important - so, too, in the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch. At the beginning of each lab session the participants sanctify the space by shifting their awareness onto spatial relations. Clear boundaries are demarcated between the daily and the ritual area. Personal belongings, notebooks, water bottles, clothing are kept outside of the ritual space. Unnecessary objects and furniture are removed from the ritual space, the floor is swept. As the performers begin to move, warm up and loosen their bodies, they continue to heighten their awareness of the ritual space. Their challenge is to see

the space, truly perceive it and discover their relationship with it and their intuitive responses to it. They each find their idiosyncratic ways of relating to the ritual space and establish a personal warm-up area within this space, “like animals stalk and claim turf” (2003, p. 5), by marking out boundaries and centre of this personal area. Whilst claiming their personal area they drop more and more from the (intellectual) head into the (instinctual) body. They feel their bodies deeply and allow for movements, stretches and physical challenges which their bodies need, i.e. they “realize those conditions that are most conducive to exciting an open and fluid state of being” (ibid, p. 5).

### **Warming up**

Once the performers have established their personal areas, they begin warming up whilst expanding their kinaesthetic and proprioceptive awareness. They are encouraged to ‘feel their bodies deeply’, by working with the following five objectives: stillness, flexing the spine, working with the core, stretching and generating heat.

- ❖ Physical stillness allows the performers to come to rest on the floor in their personal areas, to empty themselves of thoughts and habitual movement patterns. The stillness encourages internal receptivity and it makes space for increased connection with vertical sources.
- ❖ Following physical stillness, the performers begin to flex their spines through spontaneous movement and stretches across the personal warm-up area. According to Antero, the flexing of the spine stimulates the nervous system and begins to awaken the slumbering vertical energies within the body.

Nick Walker (left) & Sylvi Alli (right)  
The Alchemy Laboratory, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2006  
Photo: Jessica Bockler

- ❖ Stretches of the spine are followed by abdominal work, activating and sensitising the performers to their core. [NB This element of the warm-up was added after I participated in The Alchemy Laboratory, JB.]
- ❖ Following the core work, the group perform stretches of the muscles, allowing for a deepening of kinaesthetic and proprioceptive awareness, or *felt sense*.
- ❖ Finally, the performers are instructed by Antero to create physical movements which generate heat within the body, enough to break into sweat and to excite the nervous system into a more awakened state ... ready for *ritual embodiments*.

### **No-Form**

*"No-Form is standing on the edge of emptiness ... witnessing the Higher Self give birth to form when potentiality collapses into actuality." (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 1)*

Following the warm-up, the performers leave their personal areas within the ritual space and enter into a standing position, *no-form*, at the periphery of the ritual space. The performers approach *no-form* standing upright, striving towards vertical alignment of the spine. Slowly, they approach near perfect balance, "watching the breath; emphasizing the exhale; relaxing the desire to control and/ or direct the outcome; [...] bypassing internal chatter and disassociated imagery while constantly approaching emptiness..." (2003, p. 7) or intimacy with void.

Antero likens *no-form* to a standing Zen meditation which he values "more as a precursor to action than as a gateway to Buddhist Samadhi" (ibid). Antero employs *no-form* as a key tool for charging and discharging "subjective identification with whatever archetypal forces or energies are to be accessed, embodied, and expressed" (ibid). He asserts that real power, freedom and creativity all stem from "ongoing personal rapport with the formless, invisible sources behind all palpable, visible and manifest effects" (ibid). According to Antero, *no-form*, or intimacy with the void, invites *initiatic experience*: "Initiatic experience refers to experience that has not yet occurred to one before and for which there is no preparation or maps or models" (my interview, lines 854 - 855). "It's a certain intimacy with unknowns, with unknown territory" (ibid, lines 857 - 858).

To the mind, initiatic experience represents a challenge, a threat which nonetheless contains within itself the seed for real personal transformation.

“Any time an individual is asked to open up their mind to void or emptiness, to begin to interact with a state of existence that in some ways represents what the mind has not created, that represents what exists beyond the mind can create ... any time we are involved with increasing awareness ... right away the seeds of a transformative practice are planted because for the mind to encounter a reality beyond its own creation is a bit of a shock ... usually ... because the mind likes to believe it’s the boss. It thinks it knows everything that’s going on. It has that intellectual pride” (ibid, lines 832 - 838).

To Antero, the mind is the master of the illusory world of certainty, the mind is “a liar” (ibid, line 148) which continuously attempts to create a consistent storyline where there is only experience in the present moment. Antero acknowledges the importance of the intellectual mind. It creates stability and meaning within a world dominated by uncertainty. However, it also imposes limitations upon the individual which can lead to stagnation, frustration, meaninglessness, disempowerment, inner impoverishment and illness. The purpose of no-form then is to help performers approach *internal emergency states* in which “you’re in a position of waking up to the objective reality of uncertainty” (ibid, lines 878 - 879); and the engagement with such states is the objective of the rituals which no-form frames and which are at the heart of Antero’s paratheatrical labs.

## **Rituals**

From the state of no-form the performers enter into a variety of *rituals* which are evoked by Antero, proposing themes which pertain to the overall purpose of a lab and which initially often take the form of *opposites* or *polarities*. The themes are explored either individually (within a personal space) or collectively (within the entire ritual space).

**Working in relationship:** In each ritual the performers initially work side by side without direct interaction. “There is no pressure to encounter or relate to anybody,” (ibid, lines 563 - 564) Antero assures. He describes four stages of relationship which unfold within his labs:

In the first stage, the performers’ main responsibility is to the ritual space, to taking attention off themselves and to placing it on the space, to deepen sanctification of the space. “...that already opens up a whole different way of relating ... if you’re in a room full of people, nobody relating to anybody else but everybody moving through the space and relating to the space between people. It informs a whole different awareness and value in the movement itself” (ibid, lines 566 - 569).

In the second stage, the performers focus on developing access to their own inner landscape, to their direct experience of the vertical sources. “...there is a whole stretch of time ... it could



be a month, two months, it depends on the group ... where the room is full of people and everybody is involved in engaging in some process of accessing the internal landscape, various aspects of their own psyche, embodying them, interacting with them..." (ibid, lines 572 - 575).

Only at the third stage do the performers begin to relate to one another. The challenge now becomes one of relating to the others whilst remaining true to one's internal sources. Antero asserts that this is where his approach strays strongly from other ritual theatre practices. "... the energy we're drawing upon is from internal and vertical sources, not from each other. This is not a theatre of taking, we're approaching a theatre of offering, by securing enough access to internal sources of energy ... so that when you're ready to relate with others there is a sense of offering" (ibid, lines 583 - 586). Antero's approach firmly puts each performer in charge of his or her own creative process. "...it sets a certain tone. So if you have a whole group of people who are interacting in this way, finding their own point of offering from their own sources it's different ... from a process in which people are seeking each other for energy and relationship" (ibid, lines 588 - 590).

According to Antero, the last stage which involves developing a relationship with an audience through performance or demonstration unfolds only twenty percent of the time because paratheatre is not primarily a performance medium.

"It rarely happens, and when it happens it happens only when the group has gone through those stages of relationship that I have mentioned and are ready to raise the bar of what they're doing to performance standard. And something doesn't reach performance standard until I, the director, see that we have something to say. [...] so much that emerges from the group process is very valuable to the people involved but I don't immediately assume it's going to be valuable to an impersonal audience. I don't assume that just because it's great for us it's great for the world. But occasionally I do see elements emerging that hit on certain universal themes, or certain mythic correlations, or certain easily identifiable motifs and modalities that audiences might be able to relate to - and when I get those kinds of cues from a group, then I encourage them to move towards performance" (ibid, lines 596 - 609).

**Working individually with polarities:** "Like the archaeologist's pick-axe, effective ritual is a tool for penetrating the surface crust of our social conditioning and mining the veins of our common humanity..." (Alli, 2003, p. 8). On this journey of excavation, the polarities act as a gateway to deeper levels of exploration. Antero might evoke any number of opposites or polarities, such as 'masculine - feminine'; 'sacred - profane' or 'absence - presence'. Alternatively, he might ask the performers to choose a *personal polarity*, one which seems to carry a strong positive or negative charge, such as dislike, resistance or excitement towards the polarity.

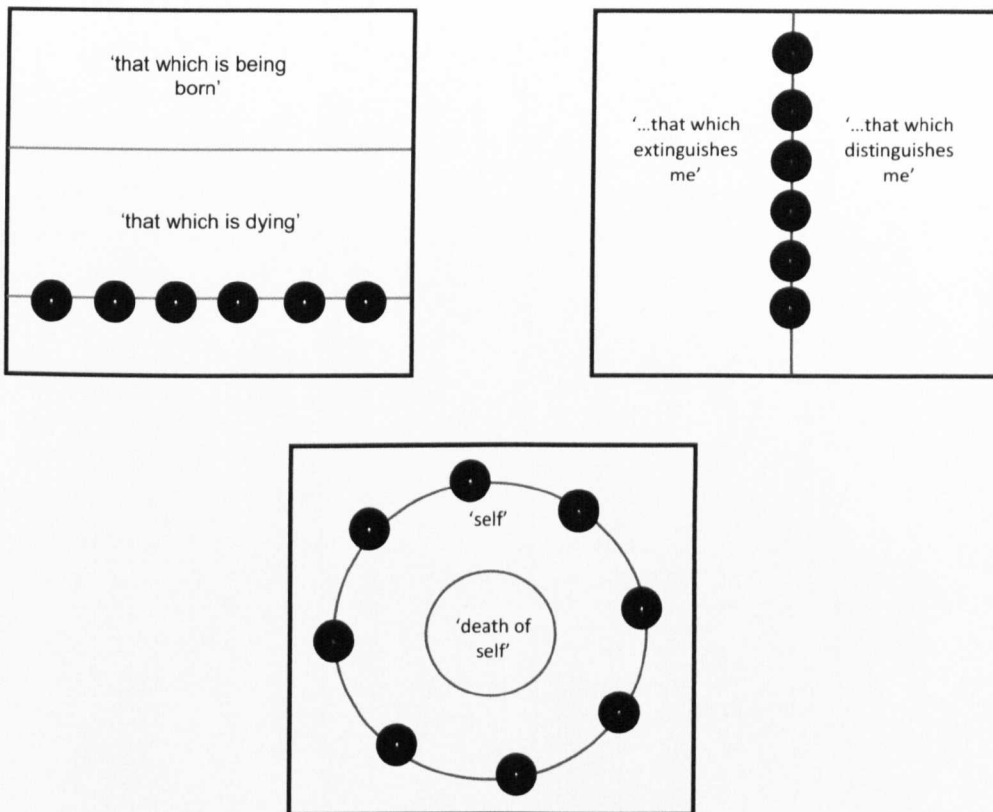
Individual work with polarities unfolds within each performer's personal ritual space. This is an area within the group ritual space which the performers have claimed for themselves. The performers will stand on the periphery of this space and enter no-form. Whilst in no-form they will visualise the personal space as divided into two halves, and they will designate each half to one aspect of the polarity. This involves an act of conscious projection, a skill important in all ritual work. The performers must be able to 'charge an area with an energy' and subject themselves to their own projections, to express them, peeling away layers of conditioning as they do so, penetrating ever deeper into the core of their being.

Once the performers feel ready, they will enter each area in turn, if necessary several times, yielding to the influence of the polarity and the psychophysical states and impulses it contains. Antero explains that the objective of this work is to render the ego more flexible. "By repeated exposure to opposing sides of oneself, it becomes more difficult to fixate on any one side over the other. A more malleable ego results, one that can permit more reality, i.e. more than one side of Self. [...] Alchemically speaking, the body acts as a kind of vessel for containing, mixing, transforming and refining the ongoing union of opposites that these polarisations catalyze" (ibid, p. 9). The performers complete the polarity work in their own time, returning to no-form at the periphery of the personal space when exploration and expression have come to a natural conclusion. No-form here helps the performers to discharge the encountered sensations, emotions, sounds, movements and images before moving on to another ritual.

**Working with group polarities:** Enactment of group polarities follows the same principles as work with individual polarities. However, now the entire ritual space may be divided a number of ways: Group polarities entail various spatial configurations utilising the entire ritual space. In one configuration the space is split into two halves, each half designated to one aspect of the polarity. A no-form zone is established either on the periphery of the space facing the two areas, or "along the dividing line of the opposites, as a 'No-Form' corridor" (ibid, p. 24).

"We stand behind one another, facing east. We enter no-form ... the corridor grows in intensity. I can see it in my mind's eye ... it is glowing with light. Here I feel the neutrality of no-form most intensely. A zero point. A point beyond no form even. A void. A potentiality which bursts with energy. Only one thought ... and it will collapse into actuality" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 1).

In another configuration the space may be split into two circles, the larger circle containing the smaller circle which is found in the centre, and no-form is established on the perimeter of the outer circle. Group polarities allow for first interaction between the performers, provided that they “feel connected enough to the source [they] are serving to maintain that connection while relating with others” (Alli, 2003, p. 25).



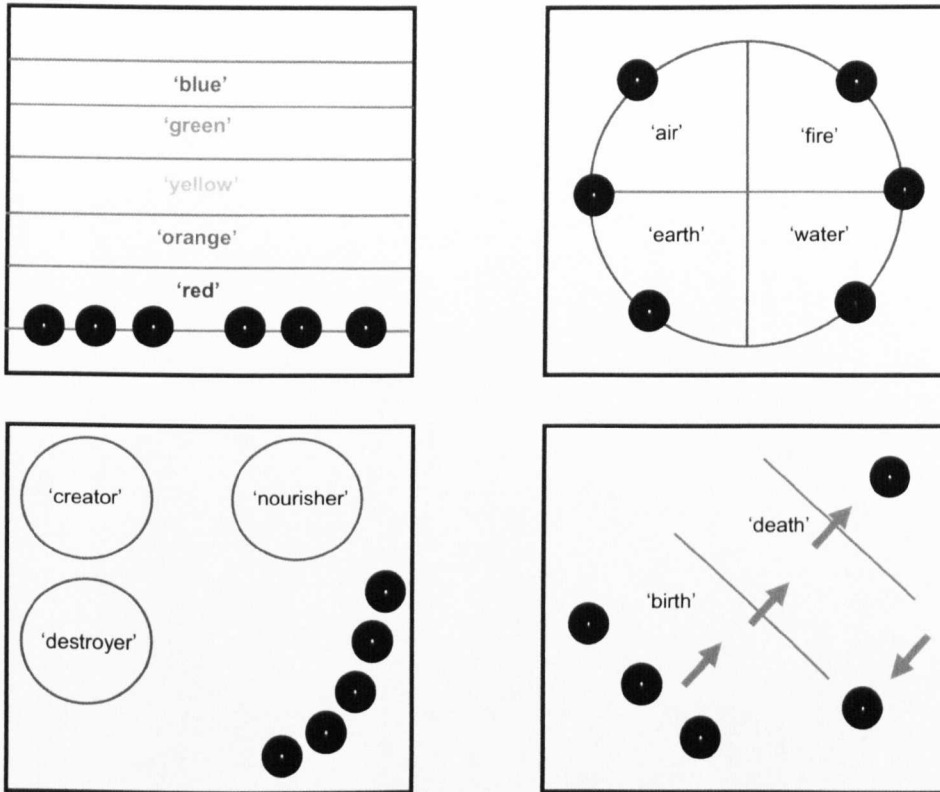
**Figure 4.2:** Spatial configurations in the ritual space: no-form line, no-form corridor & no-form circle (with examples of polarities which may be employed in the ritual work).

### Advanced rituals

Following engagement with polarities, the performers explore a number of more advanced rituals in each lab. Which shape these rituals take depends much on the overall purpose of a lab and on the level of skill and experience present in the group.

In The Alchemy Lab we explored a diversity of themes, from ‘the colour spectrum’ (splitting the ritual space into six areas) and the ‘four elements’ (working with the spatial configuration of a cross), to the triad of the ‘creator, destroyer and nourisher’ (establishing three altars within the space which served as points of connection) and rituals cycling ‘from birth through

life to death' (repeatedly journeying through the ritual space from one end, birth, to the other 'death').



**Figure 4.3:** Advanced spatial configurations: Progressive areas, cross, triad & journey (with examples of polarities which may be employed in the ritual work).

### The contact point

The performers engage with any ritual through personal *contact points*. The contact point can be described as a 'hot spot', an area through which the sought theme is already expressing itself within one's psychophysiology. In The Alchemy Lab it was as if each theme was manifesting sensations and impulses for action in a particular part of my body, and it was my proactive amplification of these sensations and impulses which led me into the embodiment and expression within any ritual. As Antero explains, "The *contact point* is wherever direct, intuitive absorption of a particular energetic state is already happening; one has only to locate it. *It already exists in the body as a source of energy.* This is an important point to grasp, as the qualities and energies explored in this medium are not always of the imagination. Our biology emanates a complexity of energy dynamics most of which, like the organs themselves, cannot be seen yet each remain vital to the organism as a whole. In fact, these sources of energy are expressions of higher emanations of which our physical organs are also manifestations" (Alli, 2003, p. 7/8). On more rare occasions in The Alchemy Lab the contact point - whilst still precise in location - seemed to exist beyond my physical body in the space around me. As

Antero asserts, “The *contact point* can also be discovered ‘non-locally’ in the auric field enveloping the physical body and in the space beyond the body’s aura, in any area of the setting designated to a particular source” (ibid, p. 8). My experience of a personal polarity in the lab session on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2006 seemed to confirm this, for it was triggered by a little jewellery sticker in the shape of a butterfly which lay upside down inside my personal ritual space. The encounter of this seemingly innocent sticker triggered the most disturbing experience I had within the entire lab. Looking back, I am certain that the sticker triggered an emergence of my shadow, repressed aspects of my personality. I will explore this experience in greater depth when I come to reflect on the specific dynamics of The Alchemy Laboratory. Using the polarity of ‘masculine - feminine’ as an example, Antero depicts the process of engaging with a contact point as follows: “Masculine energy already exists; we do not need to make it up. Allow its energy to fill the previous No-Form state of receptivity. Let it expand from its initial contact point throughout the rest of your body, moving you this way and that. Allow it to infuse your experience with its quality, colour and intensity. The orientation here is non-directional, rather than directional; the energy itself guides the direction rather than our personal will. This requires an ability to relax the desire to control or direct the energy. When the force of the energy is strong enough to move your body, you follow its direction. [...] Like clay in the hands of a sculptor, we learn to be ‘shaped’ before we start shaping. Allow yourself to be ‘created’ before you start creating. This non-directional orientation takes practice and is nurtured by the authenticity of your No-Form state; the deeper the No-Form, the deeper we can be impressed and moved by a given source through the contact point” (ibid, p. 8).

“I’m on the floor. Rolling, turning, constant fluctuation in movement, constant movement. I begin to turn my body in a circular motion ... using my legs to push off and around. Like the hands of a clock I turn ... but anti-clockwise. The motion triggers an image. I’m in a dark, vertical tunnel, climbing upwards ... towards the light. It’s a long way up. My feet are digging into the tunnel walls whilst my hands are pulling me upwards along a thick rope. The rope is strong, I am strong - [...]. The end of the tunnel ... there it is ... now within reach. I can feel sunlight on my face and arms. (The sunlight is real. My physical body has reached a spot of sunlight on the floor of the workshop space.) What is and what isn’t real? Aspects of the inner correspond with the outer ... and both shape one another. I climb out of the tunnel, shuffle my body over the edge and come to rest in the warm sunlight next to the abyss” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 14).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

## **Pitfalls and pathologies**

Working with ParaTheatrical ReSearch entails risk. Any ritual practice which involves entering into ASC and working with deeper psychic and archetypal material leads into volatile and potentially dangerous territory. Antero lists a number of pitfalls and pathologies which he has identified over the years: psychic irritation, shock, ego-inflation, and “the overwhelming force of too much information, novelty and grace. Yes, even grace can be an impediment” (ibid, p. 91).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

## **The Alchemy Laboratory: Dynamics, processes and personal insights**

To Antero, The Alchemy Laboratory “marked a return to the roots of ‘classical paratheatre’, the fundamental sources and techniques” (Alli, 2006) which he encountered through the writings of Jerzy Grotowski and the works of David Rosenbloom between 1976 and 1978. The reference to alchemy “did not reflect any conceptual manmade system but referred to a way of tracking and moving with the transformative cycles of nature via the vessel of our bodies. [...] As innate expressions of nature our bodies and psyches acted as a kind of alchemical alembic where similar processes unfolded. Here the separation of elements from the prima materia of undifferentiated experience (no-form) gave way to continuing cycles of conjunction, decay, ferment, projection, distillation, refinement, multiplication, and rebirth; over & over, again” (ibid).

There were eleven participants in The Alchemy Lab, four of them women and seven men, all of whom were above the age of 25 at the time of participating in the lab. Some of the participants had worked with Antero for over ten years, whilst others, like myself, were new to ParaTheatrical ReSearch. From 12<sup>th</sup> March to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2006 we worked twice-weekly in three-hour sessions. Each week one session took place during day-time (2 - 5pm) and one at night time (8 - 11pm). The lab culminated in a three-day wilderness trip and outdoor rituals in Pinnacles Monument Park from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June.

In the following I will attempt to articulate the dynamics I observed at work in The Alchemy Lab, as well as give an overview of the skills which seemed to be required and developed through the work.

## Orientation Meeting

Prior to the beginning of the lab, Antero called the group to an orientation meeting, at which he outlined the challenges which lay ahead. Antero introduced himself as a secondary guide, affirming that our own experiences should always be our primary source of guidance.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

## Ritual skills

During the orientation meeting Antero introduced the practice of no-form and he explained the ideas behind work with asocial intent, emphasising the importance of spatial versus social awareness. He also introduced ideas pertaining to ritual skills which he perceived as essential in this medium:

**Commitment & follow-through:** Antero places a very high value on a person's ability to commit to a ritual process and to follow through until the process comes to a natural conclusion. He asserts that commitment fosters development and growth, whereas lack of commitment promotes stagnation.

“...part of the challenge of the medium is to your own integrity ... emotionally and psychologically and spiritually. And so emotional honesty and my integrity as an individual, meaning my ability to commit to and follow through whatever truthful emotional and physical direction develops, my integrity is tested by my capacity to follow through to the end and not just go half way” (Antero, my interview, lines 78 - 83).

During the ritual work I noticed that my own commitment to the work was giving life to the processes I was exploring. Increased commitment resulted in increased psychophysical energy and connection to a particular source. My ability to follow through was what sustained the momentum in the connection and brought about articulation through *entrainment* with and *amplification* of a source, both of which I shall explore later. Following through did not mean pushing or forcing the process - instead it meant listening inward, patiently, increasing presence, awareness and receptivity, and letting go of the desire to control the outcome.

**Resistance as source:** In this work it is not unusual to encounter inner blocks and hurdles - seeming dead ends. From day one of The Alchemy Lab Antero invited us to view our own resistances as sources of energy. If we could not connect to a particular theme he would

encourage us to serve and express that disconnection. “Whatever it is ... respect your condition. Commit to whatever is happening. This commitment increases your integrity” (Antero in Jessica’s Alchemy Diary, Session 7). Antero proposes that resistance is

“frozen energy found in specific regions of the body and/ or as an overall tension or brittleness. Resistance can also result from any aspect of Self that you, or the voices in your head, judge as being wrong. Resistance can also express natural aversions to, or contractions from, what you experience as toxic or painful. [...] Sometimes a web of inhibitions accumulates around a particularly strong resistance and it forms a taboo, a kind of psychic lockup dynamic forbidding self-exposure. When resistance itself is resisted, more tension and body/psychic armour accumulate around the initial resistance, or taboo” (Alli, 2003, p. 78).

Antero thus invited us to sanctify resistance by yielding to it and serving its expression: “Sanctifying resistance means opening up to it and relating to it as a source of energy. Yielding to resistance as a force means letting your body/ voice blend with it and serve its expression, no matter how twisted or contorted” (ibid). I found that in the process of service resistance became a potent contact point in its own right, a gateway to deeper levels of exploration. Indeed, as the lab progressed I began to appreciate resistance as my guiding compass, faithfully pointing me towards aspects of myself which were ‘dying for my commitment’, i.e. shadow aspects which were in need of attention and integration.

***Entrainment, amplification & articulation:*** In the paratheatrical medium high levels of physical and vocal ability need to be matched with equally skilful *entrainment* with and *amplification* of a source to allow for its optimum *articulation* and expression. Entrainment is enabled through the commitment to increase one’s inner receptivity and through one’s capacity to resonate with a source, to become a conduit. “Resonance is the capacity for registering whatever state you are in and then matching that energy with a sound. It is not about creating or imposing a sound or listening to the sound of your own voice” (ibid, p. 77). Entrainment in turn leads to amplification of a source through movements not yet visible and audible. Articulation is the final spilling out of such micro-movements into visible patterns of motion, gestures, postures and audible sounds and utterings.

“Jogging through the chakra sequence is a powerful experience. I can feel energy circulating more freely within my body. Every chakra carries a frequency which corresponds to a sound ... I gently hum each sound as it unfolds. On - off. On - off. The sound is discontinuous. It fluctuates continuously! Discontinuous continuity ... much like a television or computer screen. On - off. I am acutely aware of the fluctuation that is me” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 14).



**Containment:** Another central skill is that of *containment*, i.e. the ability to sense individual and group boundaries, ensuring that the energies encountered and evoked in the various rituals are not carelessly dispensed and dispersed.

## Laboratory Dynamics

During my time with ParaTheatrical ReSearch I noticed several recurring dynamics or interconnected principles which were driving the work in The Alchemy Lab, as follows:

**From 'passive' receptivity toward 'active' receptivity:** One of the key objectives of The Alchemy Laboratory was the cultivation of inner receptivity, i.e. receptivity towards one's inner energies and sources. Antero distinguishes between *passive* and *active receptivity*. Whilst passive receptivity involves full absorption and fosters the capacity to immerse oneself ... it is like a "double yin" (Antero, my interview, line 264), which at its most extreme can lead one to become numb, adrift, even asleep ... active receptivity fosters pro-activity, independence and autonomy, by encouraging the individual to position him-/herself in relationship to the theme explored.

"...when you get around to letting your body respond with its impulses to a particular stimulus or source of energy you're absorbing then you have a mode of physical receptivity that's active. Whereas if you're just absorbing energy in your body passively ... eventually it will immobilise you. Then there is no impetus to move because the impulses are blocked by the inertia. Inertia is really good at blocking impulses" (ibid, lines 287 - 292).

**From 'being' the energy toward 'serving' the energy:** In the orientation meeting prior to the lab the group discussed the difference between *being* and *serving* an energy, or source. Several of the lab veterans asserted that if one 'becomes the energy' one becomes a conduit, fully charged and immersed. On the other hand, if one serves the energy one becomes a vessel, less charged and more in control of expressing and articulating that particular energy. Antero asserted that one should always aim for the latter ... for being an energy entails losing oneself, losing control, losing conscious awareness ... whereas serving an energy heightens one's awareness, fluidity and *grace* without squashing the connection to that source through too much application of *will*.

**Precision and spontaneity:** The cultivation of active receptivity and the act of serving an energy both require a balance of *precision* with *spontaneity* or *source relations*. The latter

"... is a 'stream-of-impulses' direction in which people who are adapt in that direction have somehow found very direct access to energy sources in their

bodies and they completely give themselves over to those sources. And the expression of that direction is by its nature messy and chaotic” (ibid, lines 321 - 324). It is a “convulsive eruption of raw energy that just bursts through the body, almost like a spasm, like an involuntary reflex. It’s almost like an orgasm” (ibid, lines 344 - 345).

So, whilst work with spontaneity fosters self-access, it ultimately leads to ‘soup’, i.e. raw expression which does not lend itself to any form of communication with an audience. Precision, on the other hand, has to do with the development of “choreography and form and structure, enabling communication of certain states or conditions or aspects of humanity” (ibid, lines 336 - 338). Antero asserts that whilst spontaneity has its roots in instinct, precision is related to the intellect and “how the intellect is working to shape and define the outcome, because it wants it to look good and have a certain effect. It wants control” (ibid, lines 348 - 349). “Those people who are adept in the precision line of direction ... they end up developing a very precise and technically evolved style that is dead. They have killed the spontaneity” (ibid, lines 339 - 341).

The balanced approach thus involves what I would call *controlled abandonment*, a losing of oneself whilst simultaneously keeping track of one’s process as it unfolds in relationship to the inner and outer landscape, self and others. Practiced over longer periods of time, controlled abandonment can lead to *cellular choreographies* on the level of the individual and *ritual actions* amongst a collective.

***Cellular choreographies and ritual actions versus ritual postures:*** Cellular choreographies refer to honed and refined patterns of movement which are “rooted in the cellular experience” (ibid, lines 619 - 620) of the individual. When one is able to access the body’s own organic responses, when one can “pay attention to the innate patterns of motion that ooze out of the body’s own rhythms and cycles” (ibid, lines 616 - 617) one can work towards serving those innate rhythms whilst honing and distilling them, “gradually and gently, without killing them” (ibid, line 618).

In a ritual action then, individual performers put their cellular choreographies in service of collective expression. Ritual actions may manifest when performers spontaneously collide in interaction whilst maintaining high levels of presence and source relations, sparking off “...ways of moving with other individuals that serve a cohesive mechanism that is animated by a high level of force and presence and that has its own innate purpose” (ibid, lines 633 - 635). In The Alchemy Lab I witnessed the birthing of one such ritual action when we engaged in a ritual exploring the four elements: Whilst exploring ‘fire’, several of the performers interlocked in action, resonating, aligning their expressions, finding “...patterns, physical compositions which sparked a tremendous flow and eruption of energy” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 19) amongst them.

Antero contrasts ritual actions with *ritual postures* which are marked by their rigidity and adherence to specific forms. Antero acknowledges that practice of these forms can be the right way forward for some people, pointing towards Gurdjieff as an example.

“...you know the whole Gurdjieff foundation which has many divisions all over the world, some of which practice what are called ‘the movements’ and the movements are movements which Gurdjieff who was also a dance master and dance teacher learned and taught with a specific intention. If you learn how to move in a particular way it can nudge your consciousness up a little or tilt it in this direction or that” (Antero, my interview, lines 658 - 663).

However, for Antero vulnerability to a particular energy sources takes precedence over adhering to certain forms:

“...the intuition or direct connection with the source would have to come first - otherwise you’re just imposing a Yoga posture. You take this Yoga posture that was created by somebody hundreds or thousands of years ago and you go into it and then you have a certain experience” (ibid, lines 646 - 649). “It’s not something for me, I’m not a Yoga person. This work is my Yoga. For some reason I have a real problem with conforming to any physical form that hasn’t come out of my own experience. But that’s my own eccentricity. It’s probably more the exception. There are more people that can and do find value in Yoga, or conforming to physical postures or positionings that are pre-made” (ibid, lines 665 - 670).

Instead of conforming to set postures and movements, Antero prefers conforming to his inner landscape and the postures and movements it elicits. When fully connected to a particular source,

“You can temporarily crystallize the essence of these peak moments by expressing them in full body gestures, postures and/ or mobile statues. [...] Holding a highly-charged total body gesture (for ten seconds or more) can encode the living essence of that peak moment into cellular memory for future recall” (Alli, 2003, p. 79).

### **Personal processes**

In my personal reflections on the laboratory, Antero’s references to alchemy have become highly significant. His metaphorical allusions to alchemical processes accurately depict the dynamics which shaped my experiences during and even in-between the laboratory sessions. The focus of my creative work became the transformative forces and cycles that shape me ... on all levels, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual.

***On the relationship with self and others:*** From the beginning of The Alchemy Laboratory the group cultivated an asocial climate. Whilst there had been some social interaction at the orientation meeting, from session one of the lab there was no conversation prior to the work. There were no personal introductions and no group check-in. The performers kept largely to themselves, their focus seemed inward, withdrawn. The space was filled with pregnant silence punctuated by pockets of undifferentiated sounds and utterings and textured only by Antero's ritual instructions. Being an independent person with a taste for solitude I initially found the lack of interaction and social obligations quite appealing. There was no obligation to present myself in one way or another, and so I found that I could more easily relax into being myself and doing whatever emerged in the present moment. Not at any point did I feel embarrassed when making quirky sounds or movements in the presence of people who were effectively strangers. The asocial climate enabled me to focus inward. I did not mind moving with those strangers around me. However, within a few sessions I ran into some difficulties. Whilst allowing me to be less concerned with the outside world, my inward focus was also heightening my egoic awareness. I became highly self-conscious of my actions. I was wary of self-indulgence. I compared my experiences in the lab with the workshops at The Actors Institute in New York City which places strong emphasis on the relationship between actor and spectator as a way to attenuate the actor's self-consciousness. By placing my awareness with those who were around me I had effectively attenuated inhibitory self-awareness in New York. Now the challenge was to place my awareness not on other people, but on the ritual space. However, the ritual space did not feed me and keep me occupied as other people had done in New York. It did not react. It did not laugh or smile or cough or lean forward in the seat. As such, I initially struggled to maintain the shift of awareness onto the space around me ... and I found myself turning excessively inward, staring into space only as Narcissus had stared into a pool of water. I had to find a way to adjust my focus.

“With TAI the focus is on ‘the other’ and it loosens that grip of self-awareness. Our focus on ‘the inner process’ in the ritual lab makes it harder for me to become less aware of my self. I spend energy disengaging with my self ... perhaps I need to shift my focus? Open the door yes, let the energy rise up from within ... but then realize that it is beyond the personal and that it is not only fed by my conscious imaginings but that it exists independently from me ... and that I do not need to keep it alive ... I do not need to keep feeding it? But I do need to sustain a connection. I need to become a channel. Currently egoic efforts to sustain stop me from full engagement. I must commit but not try. [...] I need to let the inner channel be open, free, and listen to that which emerges. And I need to do just that with 100% commitment. [...] Working alone ... that channelling process is much harder to sustain” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 3).

### ***On the dynamic of seeing:***

**Ignorance.** Initially maintaining a connection to a particular source of energy - eyes wide open - was difficult. I found that I had to half-close my eyes to pull the focus inward, and to shift attention from the outside world to the inner world of felt sense, imagery and impulse. I had to work hard to make sure that my expressions emerged from source relations and that they were not merely triggered by sensory input from the outside. **I had to find ways of attenuating my intellect and my desire to control the outcome of my movement work - and initially this meant ignoring the other performers in the space.**

**Being in the gap.** Where did the outside end and my inside begin? Where was my body's edge? What were my boundaries? Whilst my intuitive self was slowly easing into the working ways of the lab, my intellect was struggling with conceptual maps. In source relations was I not dependent on input from the outside, considering that I was working with my own projections ... which were out there in space? Putting my awareness on the space between people helped my inner focus and connection. As in no-form where one slips gradually into the spaces between one's own thoughts and sensations, in sourcing I began to slip into the gaps between other bodies and my own ... I learned to flow into the gaps of the sounds and movements others created. **The gaps became my riverbed into which the energies of sources could burst forth.**

**Communion.** Later, I began to experience moments in which the connection to a particular source had such force that I had no difficulties in serving and expressing it - eyes wide open. Not that such connection was always a service. To experience the difference between 'being' and 'serving' a source took time - who is to say that I had figured it out by the end of the three-month lab? Still later, but only occasionally, I could relate to some of the other performers and interact whilst serving a source. The riverbeds had begun to merge.

### ***On projection:***

Every act of seeing involves projection. We bestow the 'outside world' with meaning, and most of the time we do this unconsciously. Our perceptions are coloured by our own beliefs and the storylines they give rise to. So it was, too, in The Alchemy Lab, albeit on a more conscious level. I saw my own vision of the world unfold in the ritual space around me. The space became the container of my visions, ideas, emotions, beliefs. I subjected myself to my lenses, experienced them and learned more about them.

### ***On getting 'out of the head':***

During the sessions I discovered that *directional* and *non-directional jogs*, oscillating between control and abandonment, enabled me to drop into the body. "Continuous engagement with the space" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 2) facilitated a similar drop into bodily awareness - however, I had to keep my intellect in check, making sure that it would not interfere too much ... for it desired to dominate my spatial relations with "concepts [...] pertaining to height, depth, geometrical shapes, smells, colours" (ibid). Furthermore, *gradients of challenge* proved a very useful tool. "I varied the challenges, testing different forms: stretches, strength, balance, focus, speed ... these tests effectively attenuated my thinking mind. I became more still, more focused. I was more in the unfolding present moment. I was on the edge of unfolding" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 4). Gradually I discovered the importance of amplification in source relations. "That which brings me close is [...] sometimes repetitive, often growing in intensity, marked by sustained commitment to the process and deeply somatic. That which brings me close may involve voice ... quirky sounds and humming ... clapping, tapping and stamping" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 16). Conversely, that which removed me from source relations "is heady, thoughtful, intellectually loaded, indecisive, trapped in a decision-making process and trying too hard. It is a heavy body, a heavy heart, a lapsing commitment and a lack of energy and boredom" (ibid). Amplification unfolded primarily through movement and sound. However, occasionally word play and association came to the fore and enabled me to relate to a particular source. The following verbal play occurred whilst I was journeying through the space

"[F]rom 'fear to commitment'. [...] From No-Form I must enter 'fear' ... to reach 'commitment'. 'I can't do this!' I can't ... reverberates strongly around my body and mind. 'I can't!' I'm thrown to the floor ... I drag my body along ... 'I can't!' I enter the conversion zone. Something shifts. 'Jessica!' My name. 'Jessica ... Jess ... i ... ca. .... Jess ... i ... can. .... Yes ... I ... can. - Yes I can!' I can do this. My name says so! I am so. I can" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 22).

I became more away of how physical insight preceded verbal knowing.

First one must discover the innate purpose of a source ... and acknowledge it. Then one surrenders to it ... yields to it ... expresses it ... and finally one communicates it by rendering the expression more precise without killing the fragile connection to source. This is surfing the wave of the source! When you fall of the board ... everything turns into soup ... and when you try to dominate the wave ... your connection dies" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 23).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

### ***On ego and memory:***

“One thing that worries me ... is my memory. As my conceptual mind relaxes, the sessions are much harder to remember and the ritual processes much more difficult to language in this journal. What happens to ‘I’ when Jessica becomes immersed in the ritual work?” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 4). “What arises ... where does it come from and how is it remembered?” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 11).

I was reminded of the ideas pertaining to state-dependent memory. In my write-ups I attempted to re-enter into session mode as much as was possible (writing up at the same time of day as when the sessions were held, wearing the same clothes, writing in stream-of-consciousness mode without editing the material, interspersing writing with movement and sound) - to capture my experiences as they had unfolded in the sessions. I also began to play with drawings, to capture imagery I was encountering in the rituals. Where language was failing me deep images and felt sense remained ... imprinted in my mind and body.

In the labs, the depth of my immersion seemed to vary. I noticed that I found it easier to drop into the body and to attune my ego when working at night.

“By now I am noticing a pattern. I am not becoming as deeply immersed in the Thursday sessions as I am in the Sunday sessions. I sense that this is connected to the timing of these sessions ... on Thursdays the lab unfolds during the day ... and it is framed by a busy schedule and lots of activity in an egoic state of mind. On Sundays, however, the lab unfolds in the evening ... and as daylight subsides so does the dominant egoic state of mind” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 21).

A few weeks into the lab I met with Antero and we explored the nature of the ‘ego’ and its role in ritual work.

“Antero distinguishes between a ‘big ego’ (inflated), a ‘strong ego’ (will & skilful) and a ‘weak ego’ (under-developed). People with a big ego quickly run against a wall, Antero affirms. They cannot enter the transpersonal domains, their huge ego is blocking the way. They are caught up in egoic affairs. People with a weak ego quickly become overwhelmed by the ritual processes, they lose themselves in ritual work. People with a strong ego are best suited for asocial ritual theatre work, for they possess not only a skilful will but the emotional and mental flexibility to control and simultaneously yield to the ritual process” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 6).

At the end of The Alchemy Laboratory Antero further highlighted to me the importance of no-form in memory recall:

“The thing is ... once you can access a particular state and you can let it go ... there is a greater chance of recall. It’s actually when you remain attached that the recall is more difficult. What happens when you dis-identify from the state, no matter how wonderful it is, is that you create some space between you and that condition. And that space is what the memory and the recall requires. If you’re too glued to it ... I think it inhibits the memory function” (my interview, lines 949 - 954).

Antero’s description highlights the role of the witness in memory function. If one loses oneself in the encounter with a source, then the memory is state-dependent and the experience sinks back below the threshold of consciousness and it is forgotten until a connection with that particular source is rekindled during a subsequent ritual - in a sense one was never truly conscious of that particular source. However, if one manages to remain present and to balance immersion and abandonment with awareness and control, one is more able to integrate source encounters into egoic awareness.

### ***On no-form:***

As I was traversing through the stages of the lab, my no-form practice developed through various incarnations. Initially, whilst working keenly on achieving a position of vertical alignment and rest, I felt that no-form was “... empty and nonchalant ... but also highly charged and glowing with potential” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 7). After some time, the physical stillness of no-form was beginning to trouble me. “Physical stillness troubles me. I want to keep moving. Impulses rise to the surface and feel contained. I feel discomfort. Then the movement shifts into my mind, triggers thought after thought. Antero suggests that there may be a rebellion inside of me. What aspect of me is rebelling against stillness...” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 15)? I was experiencing a physical restlessness which was mirroring the frenzy of my mind. After some time however, this began to fade and I became less identified with my thoughts and images. Instead, my awareness began to shift towards the continuous arising of all image and thought: “... darkness, potentiality, a continuous flickering of events, atoms pop in and out of existence ... like a candle alone in darkness which flickers in the wind. Blips. Moments. Incidents. Appear and disappear ... vanish instantly as soon as they appear. This is the void of unfolding, a place of potentiality in which Source gives birth” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 16). I began to discover a process of engaging with no-form, using breath work and visualisation. “Exhale! Breathe out ... and discharge what is inside. See the shell in your mind’s eye ... then break it. Break it as you exhale ... let it make a cracking sound. What lies outside of that shell ... you do not know ... not until the shell has broken” (ibid). I worked with the image of a breaking egg shell for several sessions, experiencing each breakthrough as a birth of new thoughts and visions, triggering a subtle change in perspective. I became more aware of the gaps between the events that were my thoughts, sensations and



images - and I knew that these gaps were more truly no-form than the elaborate events which unfolded between the gaps. I gained deeper insight into the importance of no-form in source relations. "I discovered that no-form is in relationship with Source. Without one, the other could not exist. The void ... something needs to withdraw for Source to unfold. It's the withdrawal of God before creation. I feel as if I am embodying that. And this insight ... like the others ... is experiential ... somatic ... visual ... and only then, later on, conceptual" (ibid). Later still, I was able to dis-identify further from the emerging imagery and a deep sense emerged that 'I' and all emergence was held by a Great Palm of awareness which carried and contained all that was and is - a deeply rooted universal intelligence which some may call God.

"In No-Form I can now distinctly differentiate between the ground of being and that which emerges from it. Every time I am in No-Form ... I sense the Great Palm which is carrying me ... and everything around me. This palm is independent from me ... or the others. It is ... without attitude, judgement, desires, intentions. It embraces all and carries everything. And yet it is not mere empty space. It is sacred. It is aware. It is holding all that is. Without this holding ... there would be chaos, randomness, despair, collapse, instability. Whilst these forces also are held by the Great Palm of Being, they are not in charge but they are balanced with their complementaries ... engendering flow of existence. Flow between the polarities ... positive and negative ... female and male ... death and birth. On ... off. Life is fluctuation between a multiplicity of states which are always, always complementary to one another" (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 27).

Void to me became a womb of pregnant emptiness...

### ***On my journey through The Alchemy Laboratory:***

After three decades of paratheatrical investigation, Antero has identified three recurring and overlapping phases which seem to structure the work. Antero (2010b) describes these phases as intimately entwined processes which remain essential to each other, as follows:

**Access** ... involves tapping into "energy sources in the body and yielding to them as an immersive experience of self-surrender. The intent is to access, express, and embody the energetic strata of the internal landscape towards identification (merging) with the energy."

**Service** ... involves "serving the direction of the energy itself -- in stillness, gesture, voice, action -- towards clarifying its innate patterns and currents. Here, we serve the source itself rather than identify with it or impose any preconceived ideas, plans or images onto the outcome."

**Articulation** ... “involves a sustaining care for tempering spontaneity with a gently increasing precision. Too much spontaneity turns the work into self-indulgent soup; too much imposed structure kills its life. [...] This process requires a certain stamina for maintaining a dynamic tension between precision and spontaneity, between form and force, towards ever-increasing durations of concentration. Stage three can lead to expressions that can also be understood by others where communication is achieved.”

As I was journeying through The Alchemy Laboratory, I found that I was traversing through several phases which I would now describe as follows:

1) *Enchantment*: As the lab began I found myself enchanted by the work. My levels of curiosity and enthusiasm were high. I found the work intriguing, a mystery to be explored. Every exercise offered a new perspective, every session brought new experiences and ideas ... most of which were quite safe, if perhaps slightly uncomfortable. Whilst in enchantment I was largely subject to my own ego ideals, as well as some conscious fears. However, I was not really letting go, I was not entering raw territory.

“I know I need to let go, to embrace this process more fully. I consciously release my breath. The dynamic of ‘controlling and yielding’ ... it is a potent one for me. No doubt. When flow accesses me ‘I’ cannot hold on to it without destroying the moment. And yet it is useful for ‘I’ to be present. At least for the moment. I have not yet reached that place where ‘I’ is transcended. I want to go there ... but I cannot. It happens when it happens ... only when the time is right” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 1).

Still, in enchantment I encountered the odd surprise. In session 4 whilst entering the warm-up ... I became ‘a plant’:

“The plant surprises me. It is buried in the earth as a little seed and it grows. I recognise the form ... it reminds me of ‘the banana peel’ [a warm-up exercise for actors, JB]. So I grow, wiggle out of the earth - sunlight hits my face as I push out of the fresh earth. Then a surprise. I think ‘banana peel’ and try to push myself out and away from the pod which I have grown out of ... to step away - BUT one foot is stuck. I cannot lift it! Then I realise ... of course! MY ROOTS! I have roots. I cannot pull them out! And so my foot remains firmly rooted on the ground throughout the warm-up. I almost worry that I won’t be able to move my foot again for the rest of the afternoon...” (Jessica, Alchemy Diary, Session 4).

My intellect had been surprised by the plant. Whilst ‘I’ was still conceptualising what would come next within the realm of the exercise ‘banana peel’, my body responded to the reality of the plant, discovering something more authentic, something more grounded in the source I had begun to relate to.

2) *Crisis*: Initiatory experience burst forth earlier than I expected ... in session 5 which turned out to be my most difficult session in the entire three-month lab. Here my enchanted self was surprised by an emergence of an energy which forcefully asserted its presence. I experienced the encounter as a violent assault, a state of emergency, extremely unsettling and upsetting.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

I began to understand experientially the idea of the shadow as the gateway to the Self. Opposites began to lose their definition. 'Positive' and 'negative' charges fluctuated in a dance, reversing poles ... left to right, right to left ... from one ritual to the next. No longer was any thing *either/or* but *both/and*...

3) *Confusion*: As I began to lose my firm grip on myself I entered into a prolonged phase of confusion, or conceptual soup, in which I could not make sense of what I was experiencing. My memory was failing me, I struggled to keep up with my session diary and I was strongly questioning the value of The Alchemy Lab.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

Slowly I began to serve and express my shadow realm. Potent material emerged, laying bare, ritual by ritual, the unconscious knots that I was made of. Inspired by Antero's metaphor of the paratheatrical practitioner as the archaeologist who digs into the core of her humanity and excavates the ancestral, as well as the mythic and archetypal roots of her being, I began to dig, sometimes excitedly ... sometimes reluctantly, into layer after layer of felt sense and imagery. Not that the emerging material was easy to understand. At times I trusted the conceptual ambiguity which surged between the blips of egoic awareness. I realised that 'I' had to get out of the way in order to allow my source relations to flourish. At other times I battled with myself, not trusting that which was emerging and again questioning the value of the work, the setup of the lab and the quality of guidance by Antero. What was I looking for? What was I expecting?

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

I could not immediately grasp and appreciate the value of the work which lay in my consistent re-entry into the knots which bound me. I could not easily surrender. 'I' was too strong, too controlling, too clever. I had to remind myself, patiently, of the voice within which had told me to focus ... "*Let nothing come between you and it. Become it.*" I had travelled all this way to the

US to immerse myself in Antero's work, to be at one with the process - and so gradually I let myself fall ... and fall apart.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

My falling apart became my turning point. Contact points with sources were hatching all over my body, revealing small moments of insight, the deeper I let myself fall into the work. Whilst I had thus far intellectually appreciated the idea of 'serving a source' ... I had been slow to relinquish control due to my high levels of self-investment. I had fostered a long belief in the transformational value of theatre work. I had travelled half way around the world to find proof for my beliefs. I had wanted to draw together tools, develop a system, assemble the ultimate transformational theatre practice which would change the lives of people and make a difference to the world! - And here I was. Falling apart and realising that I had been driven by my internal need for a spiritual practice which would foster growth and transformation within ... me. And that I had thus far not really paid attention to what was stirring within. Gradually I entered the time of *service*.

4) *Service*: As I was learning to serve the sources I encountered within, individual themes and images expanded, and a web of metaphors and allegories emerged from the dark mist, revealing more of my deeper beliefs and values which seemed to underpin the storylines that shape my life. Individual rituals began to blend into one another, giving rise to elaborate, intricate journeys through the stories which made 'I' (see Jessica, *Alchemy Diary*, Session 10 - 14). As the lab unfolded, I was confronted with the recurring themes of surrender and sacrifice. Repeatedly I was nailed like Christ to a cross - and I realised that what was at stake ... was my faith. What was my faith?

Expressive artwork, exploring the themes of sacrifice, surrender and faith. Created in-between sessions of The Alchemy Laboratory. May 2006.

Photographic print on black card, enhanced with pastels and acrylic paint.

I had been brought up a Catholic but I had drifted away from Christianity in my late teens and I had been drawn into the culture of pick-and-mix spirituality. And there, although generally happy with my unfolding path, I had become somewhat wary and unfulfilled. I had grown accustomed to a life of freedom and creativity, following my path as a freelance artist wherever it was taking me and discovering new opportunities for growth in each direction. I was aware of my creative potential and power to manifest my path - and yet I was directionless. I was moved by others, by their visions, their ideas, their projects. I did not know what I wanted and what I was here for ... but I knew that deep within I had much more to offer. In The Alchemy Laboratory I was drawn to re-examine my spiritual beliefs and began to look at their roots. I realised that I was searching for a spiritual practice, a discipline which could give my free-flowing life a deeper sense of focus, continuity and commitment.

I had also been struggling with the meanings and implications of the word 'transcendent'. Over the years, my encounters with the world within had led to dialogues with an inner voice, which was always wise, balanced, calm, no matter what the outer circumstances. I had called this voice 'The Other' and I had come to regard him as transcendent - surpassing my ordinary sense of 'I'. Yet he claimed to know of the Transcendent, i.e. Ultimate Reality, of God. Of this I was strongly sceptical. The Other appeared to be self-existent, self-evidential, yes - however, he still appeared to originate from within; and I could not square my experience of the transcendent with the idea that I might have access to the Transcendent. Yet how much I desired such access! For years I had sought absolute answers, absolute guidance, and I had become caught up between two paths: one theistic, demanding surrender to the Great Other on route to salvation ... the second making spiritual enlightenment a matter of Self-realisation. I didn't know what to believe and I had given reign to my ego which had chosen the path of intellectual knowledge, attempting to master questions which could ultimately perhaps only be addressed through practice, by doing and being. Within The Alchemy Laboratory I realised that I needed to rediscover my faith ... and this meant surrendering my ego. By realising my journey to the US to participate in The Alchemy Laboratory, by envisioning the journey, raising the funds and making it happen I had demonstrated commitment to my own path. Something deeper was stirring within ... I was becoming more aware of my innate powers of creation. And I knew I was not wholly in charge. I was a co-creator, attracting and manifesting those means which were essential for my life journey. Other or Self - perhaps they were not so very different? Two sides of the same coin? A polarity which could be transcended? What mattered was the practice. The Alchemy Lab became my practice ... I was practicing surrender.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

The work has only begun. Before me lies the challenge of this lifetime. I know that at the core of my journey a mystery will remain. 'I' is not meant to grasp it all. The challenge is to be in the mystery, to be in service, and to have faith in that which is unfolding ... to remain committed to that raw edge of unfolding without categorising or labelling it. This was what I was able to clarify for myself within in The Alchemy Lab. I also understand that, if approached with this commitment, the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch becomes a mystical practice in which the practitioner strives for communion with verticality ... with source ... with the Divine, whatever we may conceive Divinity to be - not focusing primarily on the content of experience but on the **act of service**. Here then lies the difference between this work and psychotherapy which places its focus on the processes of making conscious those knots which bind us - that is process work, cleaning and healing. The labs may act as process work, initially; and there is value, undoubtedly, in our lighting the lamp and bringing consciousness to our knots ... we may grow more aware and integrated in the process. However, the purpose of the work is broader ... and its ultimate value may lie precisely in the commitment of the self to a higher purpose, one which the self may not, may never, fully grasp.

**P.S.: Dreamtime:** In the spring of 2008 Antero recalibrated his paratheatrical work "towards the more singular purpose of somatic non-interpretive dreamwork and a specific 'dreaming ritual' that demonstrates the results" (communication with Antero, added to my interview with Antero, lines 1103 - 1104). To this day, Antero continues to follow dream work path, building on his extensive paratheatrical experience and repertoire.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.2 for full material\*

## *The TAI Group*

### ***Theatre as Relationship***

TAI programmes in action. Photos sourced from: <http://www.thetaigroup.com>

The following depiction features the work of The TAI Group, an international teaching and consulting firm which works in the arena of creativity, leadership and organisational change. The depiction is based on my practical immersion in the approach of TAI, as well as on interviews I conducted with members of the company between 2005 and 2009, as follows:

- ✓ Interviews with Graeme Thomson, Director of Strategy and Business Development (**APPENDIX G.1**)
- ✓ *“Communicating with Power & Presence”* - workshop diary (**APPENDIX G.2**)
- ✓ Interview with Gifford Booth, Director & Co-Founder of TAI & Kathy Cramer, Director of the Cramer Institute & follow-up interview with Gifford Booth (**APPENDIX G.3**)
- ✓ Interview with Allen Schoer, CEO and Founder (**APPENDIX G.4**)
- ✓ *“The Creative Dynamic”* - workshop diary (**APPENDIX G.5**)
- ✓ Interview with Elise DeRosa, Director of Programs (**APPENDIX G.6**)
- ✓ Interview with Twila Thompson, Director and Co-Founder (**APPENDIX G.7**)

## Key Principles

***“What is at the core of you?”***

***“What is your unique vision of the world?”***

***“What do you want to create as your legacy?”***

Such are the questions explored by The TAI Group, an internationally renowned firm which consults on the human dimension of change in business, and trains CEOs, senior executives and teams from companies around the US, Europe and Asia to become more visionary thinkers and more effective leaders: From Monsanto to Merrill Lynch, from Bertelsmann to The Boston Consulting Group, from Nestle-Purina to the United States Naval Academy and non-profit organisations, TAI programmes help clients discover their authentic personal vision and presence, allowing them to authentically engage with others and bring themselves fully into their work.

TAI was founded as *The Actors Institute* in 1977 by Hollywood producer Dan Fauci, current CEO Allen Schoer, and television and screen actor Ted Danson. Leading programs for actors and other dramatic arts performers from Los Angeles to London, The Actors Institute helped them renew their professional spirit and refocus their creative energies. Many actors spend most of their working lives dealing with rejection and looking for work. In the USA, the performing arts unions have the lowest percentage of employment of any union. Allen Schoer asserts that the effects of these circumstances are devastating on the work force. The artists lose the impetus in their work, they stop taking risks, they avoid challenges and they become “freeze-dried” (Allen, my interview, line, 163). Allen explains that the original programmes of The Actors Institute were about helping

“artists to find ways to rejuvenate their creative spirit. Take risks again, nothing airy fairy, nothing new age, nothing psychological - just good old coaching work, helping to strip away the layers of rust, fear, non-risk taking, and helping them take pleasure in their work again and take on new challenges and risks” (ibid, lines 168 - 172).

It was the phenomenal success of the initial programmes - particularly one entitled *The Mastery* which the company has redesigned today as *The Creative Dynamic* - which led to a demand beyond the theatre.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*



In recent years TAI has repositioned itself, moving from the sphere of the performing arts to the much larger platform of creativity and organisational leadership consultancy, engaging with large and small companies worldwide. At the heart of this re-positioning was the realisation that the people of TAI had much more to offer than speaker and presentation training. Allen asserts that what distinguishes TAI from other companies in the consultancy business is that whilst utilising the key principles of the performing arts, TAI no longer relies on traditional theatre games and exercises within their work. "We are not interested in turning people into performers. We are interested in bringing out the creative vitality within you - and we don't need theatre games to do that" (Allen, my interview, lines 233 - 235). Director of Strategy and Business Development Graeme Thomson further asserts,

"...what is the impact of releasing that creativity within people from a business perspective? It's about how people become leaders. Not how they emulate, not how they see others' tricks and traits and how they become somebody else, but how they truly see their own vision, use that creativity, have an impact on other people through an authentic, real relationship, and therefore as a consequence are able to lead. As an organic part of their own being. Not as a management technique" (Graeme, my interview, lines 12 - 17).

He continues, "we know deep insights about personal vision, creativity, and relationships are the key to opening up possibilities for change and growth. When we're 'present' - listening to others and communicating from a place of deeper self-knowledge - then powerful leadership becomes a *consequence* of the impact we have on those around us. We call this 'Experiential Leadership'. This approach sets the scene for profound change - the 're-engineering of human capital' at all levels of business" (Thomson, 2010).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

When asked to define creativity, Allen likens it to electricity. "You don't see electricity but you see its results. [...] It's an ever present force and energy - and it's looking to guide you in everything you do. [...] I do not buy the societal beliefs that creativity has been unevenly handed out in the world. I think it's equally present, alive in each of us, differently so, but equally present and alive. And truthfully it's the degree to which we access it ... it's the lid" (Allen, my interview, lines 247 - 253). Similarly, TAI Director Twila Thompson asserts, "...it's not about increasing your creativity, it's increasing your receptivity to your creativity. You don't become more creative. You access it more fully" (Twila, my interview, lines 394 - 396).

The people at TAI believe that creativity is an infinite source within each individual. Allen further expresses that this source finds unique expression through each individual.

"I say that you have a unique way of seeing the world and you're looking to express it in everything you do. [...] it's as personal to us as our DNA, as our fingerprints. And that personal way of viewing the world, I say, has always been there. As adults we may forget it because it's probably not been cultivated in a lot of our conversations and educational processes - but that doesn't mean it's not there. And that personal way of viewing the world I call 'vision'" (Allen, my interview, lines 260 - 267).

Vision, Allen asserts, is not something which we need to strive for or attain. Vision unfolds when we follow our deeper impulses and desires. Vision is our unique way of grasping the world and of expressing ourselves in relation to it.

"...we believe that the innate genius within you is what needs to be cultivated. We're not going to teach you a system. We don't do things our way, we help you do things your way. And you have your own unique creative methodology, your own way of creating what you create in the world. Our job is to help you experience that living relationship to that and maximise that" (ibid, lines 281 - 286).

### **Stripping away self-limiting beliefs**

To enable people to access their creative sources and to act from a place of inner authenticity often requires TAI to help clients recognise and strip away self-limiting beliefs which they have accumulated over their lifetime. As Graeme explains,

"if we look back at our childhood and if we look at children ... they are very direct, they are very impulsive, they are very creative, and they relate and play in a very authentic and immediate way. But adults aren't like that because of these layers of behaviour that have built up that prevent them from doing so" (Graeme, my interview, lines 327 - 330). "Very often what gets in the road of that is all this other stuff is other people telling you what you can do and can't do. Other viewpoints gradually build up to create a picture of you that you have to wear like a sleeve..." (ibid, lines 253 - 255).

Twila further asserts,

"there is a lot of fear around ... we have given that word so much importance ... creativity! And a lot of people have this belief that there are creative people and 'I'm not one of them.' This idea that there is a limited amount of creativity in the world and 'I didn't get it.' [...] People think of creativity as belonging to artists, belonging to geniuses. Instead of using our heroes to inspire us we use them to put ourselves down: Wow, I could never attain that, so why even try?" (Twila, my interview, lines 361 - 369).

Twila believes that creativity is a universal force which is active within us all. She explains that should this force not be allowed to flourish and express itself naturally, it may manifest itself in destructive ways.

“You see it with kids, [...] if you don’t allow them to try something then they’ll have a tantrum. [...] In organisations where people are not encouraged to be creative you see a lot of backbiting - because that energy has to go somewhere. [...] If we don’t allow it to be expressed clearly and cleanly, if we don’t allow it to turn into something that we want, if we’re too caught up in our fears and negative beliefs, it will come out in some self-destructive behaviour. Overeating, addiction. Addiction: no one ever starts out saying, ‘OK, I’m going to drink and in a few years I’m going to feel very bad about myself...’ Rather, it’s something about comfort: I can’t deal with everything I want, so let me have a drink, a drug. Addiction is a short term solution when we think we have no choice” (ibid, lines 377 - 389).

TAI penetrates through the clients’ self-limiting beliefs ... sometimes head on, sometimes through the back door. This process may unfold quickly and easily, or it may require a deep dig, for some clients use the self-limiting beliefs and behaviour patterns to shield themselves from themselves.

“We do a fundamental piece of work called the ‘tell’. A tell is a midden in archaeological terms, a tell is a heap. We [...] are telling about ourselves, but we’re also digging into this archaeological midden that is our life. [...] we dig and peel those layers away... and find out what is that is that core of our existence” (Graeme, my interview, lines 208 - 211).

### **On the Socratic Method**

By digging into the ‘midden’ of a client’s life, TAI cultivates the individual’s access to his/ her innate knowledge. The company brings its clients into direct relationship with themselves. “...one of the greatest jobs we can do as human beings is help others learn more about themselves from themselves. That’s the work we do, it’s cultivating first-hand knowledge. If you invest in exploring your own creativity and vision, you are going to be in the realm of first-hand knowledge” (Allen, my interview, lines 309 - 313). TAI facilitate access to innate knowledge by taking clients out of their comfort zone. The clients are challenged to explore their beliefs about the world and about themselves. TAI propose that discomfort is part and parcel of self-exploration. Where there is the opportunity for deeper insight, there is risk.

Whatever the fear, whatever the belief, whatever shows up in a coaching situation, TAI hold up the mirror. The company describe their approach as Socratic.

“We ask a lot of questions. Very probing questions, to which ‘yes’ or ‘no’ will never be the answer. We’re looking for the real answer, which is where things get uncomfortable for people. Where people may not want to confront things, and we’ll help them do that in a supportive environment, whether it’s a group environment or an individual environment. A big part of the training is about being safe, supportive in that role all the time. And the questioning process that goes on it’s the kind of questioning process that counsellors would recognise” (Graeme, my interview, lines 356 - 362).

Whilst clients are taken into discomfort, they are not challenged to breaking point. TAI does not seek to destroy and deconstruct. Instead, TAI seeks to enable. “We just provide the environment and we start people on the process, help guide them through it. All this work is not about us - it’s about the client, about what they do ... we get them doing it ... we help them reveal things” (ibid, lines 788 - 790).

TAI proposes that beyond the initial level of discomfort lies a deeper level of self-discovery and self-empowerment. Once they have pushed through discomfort, clients begin to see not what their limitations are ... but what they CAN do, indeed, what they have the power to achieve - and this insight often comes as an inspiring and uplifting surprise. TAI helps reveal the spark of genius within each person.

### **On Therapy**

TAI take a distinctly non-psychoanalytical approach. “[i]t’s not about analysis, it’s about what works for you and how do you find out about who you really are ... in that experiential way ... so you know what that is, rather than having a cognitive intellectual understanding of it, you actually understand it from the heart” (ibid, 559 - 562). And while TAI conducts assessments based on values, motivations and preferences, the company do not enter into psychotherapeutic relationships with their clients. They do not focus on the clients’ problems and past history. Instead, they focus on what

“is right at the heart of you, what’s non-negotiable, what’s the thing you really want to do, what is it that keeps recurring to you throughout your life, not what’s wrong and what you’re problems are, but what’s good and what works and where does all that come from and how important is it really to you” (ibid, 569 - 573).

Similarly, Allen asserts,

“If we were to address the blocks we’d be doing psychology. We’re not skilled at that. Our job is to give people the experience that they are creative at the same

time. Now, if someone brings up a block, we listen to it, we hear it - and if we were therapists we'd then address the block and what's in the block and take it apart. We instead then go around the backdoor and invite the creativity in the individual to come out - and they are surprised, 'My God, I had this block, but I am also creative?' So, their creativity often melts their own blocks" (Allen, my interview, lines 317 - 325).

Whilst TAI do not engage in therapy, many clients describe the work as therapeutic.

"[p]eople say, 'God, that seems like therapy.' People come out and they feel better about themselves. [...] But is it really therapy? No. It's probably therapeutic - but it's not the art and science of therapy. We don't do therapy practices. When you feel better about yourself, when you feel moved by who you are, is it therapeutic - yeah! But it's not a therapy practice" (ibid, 391 - 396).

### **On spirituality**

TAI does not employ a spiritual frame to articulate the work. However, their clients can well conceptualise their experiences in this way, should they want to. "We don't talk about the spiritual at all ... but it can become ... if some people see the experiences they have from a religious or spiritual perspective ... that's fine" (Graeme, my interview, lines 301 - 302).

"People from all walks of life over the years have told us, continue to tell us, that our work has many applications. Sometimes this reminds me of spiritual disciplines and spiritual/philosophical perspectives. Sometimes it reminds me of psychological approaches. And I was saying to my folks yesterday that people choose their own connections. It's wonderful. But do we hold the work in that light - no. We don't. I appreciate that people find the universality in it - that lets us know that we're onto something that's greater than all of us and we are in each way aligning with that when doing our work on that path but is it spiritual? ... Well, if you choose it to be" (Allen, my interview, lines 380 - 388).

Twila asserts that the work of TAI has a "spiritual effect" (Twila, 430) which she relates to TAI's fundamental drive towards mindfulness: TAI aims to enable each client to be more aware, more present in the moment. Increased presence and awareness lead to enhanced access of one's inner resources, one's inner creativity.

Some of the TAI staff follow their own spiritual practices. Graeme is drawn towards Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and has been practising Transcendental Meditation since 1970. Twila and Gifford have partaken in Vipassana meditation retreats. Gifford refreshes his creative practice with regular retreats and workshops at Wonder Works Studio, Vermont, under the lead of Toni Stone who continuously introduces him to many different "practical metaphysics"

(Gifford, my interview, line 1108) from wisdom traditions around the world. Three times per day, Gifford practices 'intention calls' with Toni, as well as two other people. These are actual phone calls which he describes as "moments of quiet intending for the world. Moments of gratitude. Moments of affirmation" (ibid, lines 1138 - 1139). Gifford proposes that "these calls are based on the knowledge that what you say, manifests. So what you speak about comes into being" (ibid, lines 1159 - 1160). Gifford deeply believes in the power of words. "[w]ords are generative" (ibid, line 1163).

Twila, Allen and Gifford have also been influenced by the philosophy of Earnest Holmes which has become known as *Science of Mind*. Gifford asserts that Science of Mind is a philosophy, not a religion, because it is "open at the top" (ibid, line 1108). Twila relates to Science of Mind as the idea that "the entire universe is a creative mind and your intention can actually shift what's happening" (Twila, my interview, lines 454 - 455). She also explains that Science of Mind is "Christian Science but without the dogma and without Jesus. They do reference Jesus but in a very different way, as an example of a higher being..." (ibid, lines 465 - 466). Twila recalls how in the past when TAI was struggling, she, Allen and Gifford pursued practices associated with Science of Mind "...and if nothing else it helped us think differently about ourselves - which helped move us more towards where we are at now" (ibid, lines 456 - 458).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

### **On the principles of performance**

Within all their training, TAI draw from the world of performance, for performance fosters relationship; and in the quest for enhanced self-access and creativity, relationship is central.

"It's about my relationship with my script, it's about my relationship with myself and it's about my relationship with the world around me. It's about my relationship with others. The only way I can have that impact I want as a performer is by getting into a real relationship with my audience. Whether that audience is one person across a table or a thousand people in an auditorium [...] If you're a painter it's about your relationship with the world you see, your canvas and your paints and you. If you're on a stage or if you are in a world with other people, it's about those other people and you and the impact you want to have on them. At the centre of this cycle of creativity is relationship. Everything, vision, creativity, impact, leadership all circle around this concept of relationship" (Graeme, my interview, lines 335 - 345).

Theatre offers TAI an experiential lens:

“Because theatre is [...] about DOING, being in the moment, feeling what it’s like physically and mentally. Not just reading what it might be like or trying to understand cognitively what this is about conceptually ... so there is the difference between the conceptual and the real. We take it from the descriptive to the experiential ... doing it, feeling it, understanding it. The theatre concepts about relationship, presence, character, vision, impact, audience, actor ... these are all a particular lens through which we can see these universal truths about ourselves and how we are creative and how we create growth and how real relationships can be extraordinarily powerful” (ibid, lines 682 - 689).

TAI’s work starts with the individual. At the heart of the work is one-to-one coaching, even in group settings.

“...others watch and the watching is an active role, not a passive role. So, while you are being coached others are watching you being coached. And while you are watching others you will get involved in the coaching process. Because you will be asked for immediate feedback. You will be asked to contribute, so it’s a very dynamic process. Our workshops are not about us giving people techniques or skills and imparting them ... they are about a growth process in the moment” (ibid, lines 856 - 861).

In all their work TAI emphasises the role of visceral learning, learning through the body. The focus is on embodiment versus presentation. Allen draws comparisons to theatre:

“If you see someone shallowly performing a role and trying to demonstrate all the emotions, all the subtext of the character, all the objectives ... not a terribly interesting performance. It’s a sort of ‘Look at me’ - isn’t it? But when you see someone who with great simplicity and with great stillness embodies so much more than can ever be expressed in words ... has even so many conflicting and diverse colours emanating from them, as if they are the screen upon which it’s occurring ... we see this in real life. We see people who posture versus people who embody. We watch those people who move with natural posture, natural gravitas, natural elegance and do not in any way have to sell who they are but the experience of being with them is so much deeper” (Allen, my interview, lines 443 - 452).

Graeme (Thomson, 2010) further emphasises that TAI’s experiential approach combines the exploration of a person’s essential drivers with the continuous practice of ‘being in the moment’: “We draw on the heuristic, the artistic, the aesthetic and the ethical to help clients gain new insights (‘Inward Action’) and change what they do (‘Outward Action’). The client experiences a series of ‘creative pauses’ when heightened awareness and internal investigation turn outwards to response and action.”

Comparing TAI’s approach to the craft of the performer, Allen describes TAI’s work as an organic, internal approach.

"I've often talked in my work about interpreting a character and being guided by a character. If we interpret a character, which is a good way for a beginning actor, here we begin to learn intellectually about what the character is saying and what is said about the character - but eventually as we [...] work deeply, we must allow for how the character guides us. [...] Is it ultimately about greater authenticity? Absolutely" (Allen, my interview, lines 497 - 504).

Twila relates TAI's approach to Sanford Meisner's acting technique which is often described as "living truthfully under a given set of imaginary circumstances" (Twila, my interview, lines 587 - 588).

"You have to be honest - and that's what I tell clients all the time because they think when they first hear, 'Oh we're doing acting exercises', that they have to fake it. No, actually, you're going to be more truthful" (ibid, lines 598 - 601).

Twila also points back to the original meaning of theatre.

"...the word for actor in modern Greek is 'ethopius', 'pius' is creator - so the actor is the creator of an ethos. Isn't that a wonderful way to think about it? Theatre was the original way of storytelling and theatre was originally about creation. Now it's just associated with entertainment. There was a time when theatre would cause riots in the streets! Because that's how powerful the effect of this art is. Actors were the original spiritual guides, often political guides - theatre in some of its earliest incarnations was about celebrating change, causing change..." (ibid, lines 486 - 493).

Allen asserts that in TAI's work non-performers sometimes do better than professionally trained actors:

"sometimes some of the most authentic work comes from people who are not in the theatre. Because they don't have the investment, the charge on 'doing it well'. They are just up there. And they are simple and vulnerable and they are probably more humane. And they don't have all the craft, the skill, the technique" (Allen, my interview lines 515 - 519).

### **On relationship and deep change**

TAI is a company which cherishes relationship. "They endeavour to bring their clients into relationship with themselves and their audiences ... and the company's philosophy is reflected in the way people interact with one another. The dynamics in the offices seem relaxed, supportive, passionate, driven, honest" (Jessica, Power & Presence Diary, lines 26 - 30).



TAI aims to foster long-term relationships with their clients. The company recognises that personal growth work takes time - and that it cannot fully unfold over a two-day workshop, despite the transformational experiences clients often report when they emerge from TAI workshops. It is one thing to have an experience. But to really affect change within ... one has to practice. "We have to change the habits and the muscles of a lifetime" (Graeme, my interview, line 701).

"We all have patterns, OK? And when suddenly you experience something new and different about yourself you get a different perspective about yourself. When an individual finds a way of articulating their vision, they suddenly feel at home: 'Wow, that's me!' And in that moment they're suddenly not chasing the world, they are living in the middle of their own universe. But from there it's going to need continual practice. [...] And so, do we encourage people to work with us on a one-off basis? No. The work is developmental, there is always a syllabus and it's always over time. You continue to deepen and deepen and deepen the practice" (Allen, my interview, lines 354 - 365).

Similarly, Twila asserts,

"There will often be a big, dramatic epiphany - but an epiphany needs to be followed by practice and the practice to me is where the real transformation takes place. The breakthrough moment is just the opening up. [...] the real transformation has to happen where it gets into the body, into the muscles" (Twila, my interview, lines 547 - 553).

What often starts as a six-month engagement with a client becomes a two- or three-year journey.

"With some clients we have been working for four or five years. It's a journey we're asking people to embark on, but even in that two-day workshop people start on a journey, they start to experience themselves and the impact they can have on the world" (Graeme, my interview, lines 388 - 391).

The people of TAI benefit from these journeys as much as their clients.

"Every time our coaches do the work they learn something. Something about themselves or something about other people. And that's a very powerful part of it. You can't avoid it. When you get engaged with people ... you're having an impact on them and they're having an impact on you. It's a growth process on both sides" (ibid, lines 834 - 837).

TAI regularly receive feedback from their clients that their interventions trigger not only personal but deep organisational changes. When the creative practice of an individual client deepens it becomes embodied and habitual. Individual behaviour patterns change and the

individual becomes a natural “advocate of change” (Twila, my interview, line 579), subtly influencing and transforming the behaviour patterns of his/ her colleagues. In the Boston Consulting Group, one of TAI’s long-standing clients, Twila has noticed a fundamental shift in language which has become much more creative and much more relational. Another client recently reported back to Twila, describing how he was “spreading his approach to the next generation” (ibid, lines 578 - 579). Graeme reports on the organisational turnaround in the case of TAI’s client Harcourt Assessments, one of the world’s leading education testing firms which sought support from TAI in 2006 after a new CEO, Michael Hansen, had been appointed to the company and found the business in trouble. “The executive team was rudderless, the divisions were operating in silos, error rates in tests were high, clients were abandoning ship, the company was taking a pounding in the press, and financial metrics were heading south” (Thomson, 2010). Hansen describes TAI’s role in the transformation of Harcourt Assessments as one of enabling his executive team to find personal alignment with the company. Hansen found that such alignment was achieved through open, honest and empathic communication which focused on the individuals and their contributions to the company, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Harcourt Assessments’ director of public relations at the time, Russell Schweiss, commented “...vulnerability and humility are watermarks of good leadership. Sometimes there's nothing healthier than being vulnerable in front of people that you're working with regularly, so they can see your humanity. Because they're human, too, they know they have weaknesses. To see someone else admit to it gives them the freedom to do the same” (ibid).

Harcourt Assessments found that TAI’s approach enabled remarkable organizational change. An employment satisfaction survey carried out in mid-2007 showed clear attitudinal changes in the employee’s levels of trust and confidence in senior management, and the company’s financial fortunes had turned from red to a healthy black.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

## **TAI Programmes**

TAI operate a spectrum of programmes, from one-day open-access workshops in speaker development, communication skills and creativity to extensive customised programmes which may unfold over a period of several years and which tackle corporate leadership and organisational change. At the heart of TAI are its foundation programmes: *Communicating with Power and Presence*, *The Creative Dynamic* and *The Tell*. What follows is a detailed depiction of the first two programmes in which I participated. The depiction is based on my

own workshop diaries, as well as a number of follow-up interviews which I conducted with the programme leaders.

## **Communicating with Power and Presence**

*“It’s being and being seen, it’s what the true witness is able to do for the other. It’s beyond listening, it’s beyond anything we’d call coaching ... it’s really the insatiable desire to get the other and then to give the other a chance to see themselves and to go some place new”* (Kathy, my interview, lines 261 - 264).

Whilst *Communicating with Power and Presence* naturally attracts professionals who want to sharpen their communication skills, the two-day programme goes beyond effective presentation training. TAI assert that the workshop helps presenters learn how to build relationships with an audience, incorporate feedback, infuse personal expression into content, and provide insightful responses as an audience member, thus allowing for greater vitality and impact while communicating. In the following I shall feature key elements of the structure, content and underlying philosophy of the workshop, whilst also reflecting on my personal experience of *Communicating with Power and Presence*.

### **Uniting Theatre and Psychology**

*Communicating with Power and Presence* benefits from a fruitful collaboration between TAI and the Cramer Institute, St. Louis. At the time I participated in the workshop at the TAI offices in New York City, it was facilitated by **Gifford Booth**, Director and Co-Founder of TAI, and **Kathryn Cramer**, the Founder of the Cramer Institute.

Kathy Cramer  
Photo supplied by the Cramer Institute.

Gifford Booth  
Photo supplied by TAI.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

Gifford is an artist, performer and theatre director who has spent the past twenty-five years guiding entrepreneurs in creative leadership and personal effectiveness. Gifford describes himself as “a child of the sixties, it was the Living Theatre, it was the Open Theatre, it was Grotowski, it’s involving the audience, it’s taking the audience on a journey ... and in the guise of a workshop I can still do that and they don’t even know. It’s like a one-man or two-person show that transforms people” (ibid, lines 194 - 197).

In *Communicating with Power and Presence* Gifford has become the enthusiastic and creative counterbalance to Kathy, who is a practising psychologist experienced in organisational change consultation, team development and executive coaching. Early on in her career, Kathy co-founded the Stress Center at St. Louis University and developed programmes in corporate wellness, stress prevention and lifestyle improvement; these were later adopted nationwide by more than 300 corporations, 60 hospitals, and the United States Air Force. More recently, Kathy and her colleagues at The Cramer Institute have pioneered the development of *Asset-Based Thinking* (ABT) approaches to coaching, consulting, and training processes. Under Kathy's leadership, organisations such as Monsanto, Microsoft, Starbucks and the US Air Force have adopted ABT approaches to developing their leaders and managing change.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

## **Working Principles**

### ***Seeing and being seen!***

Throughout the workshop, Kathy and Gifford emphasised the importance of working with awareness, of exploring and investigating one’s audience during a presentation. As a presenter, one needs to be in “[R]elationship with one’s own body, [in] relationship with the content of one’s presentation and [in] relationship with one’s audience” (Jessica, *Power & Presence Diary*, lines 83 - 85). Kathy explained that according to statistics which map the retention of information, the substance of a presentation is by far not as important as the passion with which it is shared. The substance has to be there in any presentation - but the substance can only be communicated effectively through the sizzle and soul of a speaker.

“The word ‘Investigate’ is written in large letters on a flipchart. ‘Investigate what is happening ... without judging it. Continuously investigate. Investigation lifts the fog between the audience and the speaker. It enables connection.’” (ibid, lines 114 - 117). Audience investigation is central to TAI’s approach. “I am reminded of the Meisner technique which works with the performer’s awareness of the ‘other’ and with the underlying energy flow of each engagement” (ibid, lines 230 - 232).

Kathy proposes that the efficacy of audience investigation revolves around the underlying dynamic of the witness and the powerful experience of being seen. As a performer,

“...the power in your presence is to see the audience ... so that the audience feels seen. And it just doesn't happen very often anywhere ... that you get that reciprocity. So, what you've got is relationship between ... the presenter - the leader in the room needs to go first ... by investigating what happening in the audience and what's happening in-between. And in a very un-self-conscious way I am all about the other. And I take 100% responsibility for what's happening in the relationship. So, there is a little bit of a paradox there” (Kathy, my interview, lines 240 - 246).

Kathy and Gifford assert that audiences know when performers are authentic and sincere in their offering and when they are not.

“...when a person is able to be integrated and vulnerable simultaneously ... by integrated I mean 'that which has engraved itself on my life ... the wonderful things, the awful things ... and I own that.' I own my wonder, I own my awe, I own my sense of pain and suffering AND I want to connect to that in you. My offer is ... let's be real together. And people always know if that's the offer” (ibid, lines 340 - 344).

If both performer and spectator are sincerely committed to the performance relationship, then a shift will occur.

“Now, the audience might show you something that they need or want that is completely different from what you thought they did - and that might cause the shift in you ... or it could be that they really want what you thought they need but the way you're giving it to them isn't working ... so there is this constant commitment on the part of the person upfront to stay in relationship, such that something important happens for the audience” (ibid, lines 317 - 322).

A performance will have impact if the performer “can be vulnerable and integrated [...] and is willing to dive into the unknown or let go of their preconceived ideas and be vulnerable and stay in relationship with the audience and in the unknowing” (Gifford, my interview, lines 350 - 352). Conversely, “When a person is unwilling to do that, when their attention is on themselves, when they need to do it their way, when they're not willing to be influenced by the audience, when they're not willing to have a relationship or follow the audience's lead” (ibid, lines 353 - 356) then the performance will have less, even no impact.

Overall, Kathy and Gifford both assert that the power of any performance lies in its witnessing, in being deeply present with the other, or even with oneself if one is working

alone and without audience. "There has to be the other looking in for knowledge to happen. Even if it's your own self-awareness" (ibid, lines 292 - 293). Gifford goes so far to assert that the only way we can truly see ourselves is through the eyes of others.

### ***On Mirroring***

Kathy and Gifford further propose that any reciprocal relationship involves a mirroring of the other. Kathy refers to the research by Bandler and Grinder which led to the development of NLP. Prior to creating NLP, the two psychologists were

"doing the definitive study on whose brand of therapy was the best. And so they looked at Rogers, Virginia Satir ... the point is that they had hours and hours of video tape and they were watching this to see when the breakthroughs happened, hoping that they were going to be able to rate brands of therapy. And what they found was that it did not matter what the brand of therapy was. What mattered was if the therapist was 'in synch' with the client. They called it 'in synch'. And it really is 'in relationship'. And the way they noticed it was from body language that mirrored the client. So, all of a sudden Carl Rogers would be leaning over with his arms crossed - and lo and behold the client on the couch would be doing the same thing. And with Satir - the same thing. The client is on the edge of her seat ... Virginia is on the edge of her seat! So, the body mirrored it ... this was all unconscious" (Kathy, my interview, lines 485 - 496).

Kathy proposes that things went awry when the psychologists tried to qualify the nature of people's mental processing, thus placing them in boxes which "ruined the whole thing. Then, of course, you're not in synch. You're trying to figure out, is this an auditory person, a visual person or whatever" (ibid, lines 501 - 502).

At TAI and at the Cramer Institute, the coaches take a client-centred approach. They place the relationship with the client at the heart of the encounter. They take the lead from the client. They try not to judge, not to pre-empt. They try to be fully present with the other. "I put all my attention on them ... I see very clearly ... and then I take on their bodies. I mirror them ... and then I know what's going on. This all happens in split seconds. I mirror them. I put myself in their shoes" (Gifford, my interview, lines 615 - 617). Kathy proposes that the identification with the other goes so far that

"you can start to function for the person. Know what's ready to happen, know what is available. And of course, you can lead with the body. [...] I do it with the face and the eyes. [...] It's not like I can read their minds, I have to be in a sensory way somehow getting them! And I'm also getting it through the voice. What's happening ... what's the congruity ... incongruity ... between what they're saying,

how they're saying it, what their face looks like" (Kathy, my interview, lines 620 - 626).

### ***Value your audience!***

Kathy and Gifford propose that the participants' observations ought to take an asset based approach. "Find the assets within each audience. Find something amazing about your audience. Something that inspires you. Something that is useful to your relationship. 'Value your audience,' Kathy & Gifford emphasise" (Jessica, Power & Presence Diary, lines 128 - 130).

Throughout the workshop, Kathy and Gifford focus the clients on Asset-Based-Thinking, as developed by the Cramer Institute. In ABT, the Cramer Institute and TAI find deep resonance. ABT is a key feature in all of TAI's work. "Everything is desire driven here. What is it that you want and how is it that we can conspire to make sure you get that? So, we get the person in the 'what do we want?' mode first" (Kathy, my interview, lines 818 - 820). Central in the ABT approach is work with non-judgemental attention. At the beginning of each TAI workshop, the clients are led through observation exercises which ask them to notice their environment without judging, classifying or labelling it. This "...helps people really experience what it's like when their judgement shows up ... when they have to say something that is conceptual rather than just descriptive, how they need to be focusing ... what kind of attention and awareness they need to be generating in order to be in the work" (ibid, lines 824 - 827).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

### ***Be with the other - not with yourself!***

One of the central notions of the workshop which Gifford and Kathy continuously impress on us ... is to be with one's audience and to leave the reflexive, and often judgemental self-observer behind.

"Be with your audience ... out there! I'm reminded of the concept of flow. Gifford asserts that flow comes from being with the other, not with the self. In Ken Wilber's terms I would say that the distal self - the 'me' - is continually dethroned ... so that the proximate self - the 'I' - may take control. Then there is only being ... and no observing, at least from an egoic perspective. There will still be the higher Witness, the 'silent presence, like the sun which illuminates the things' - as Grotowski wrote in *Performer* (1990)" (ibid, lines 140 - 146).

Kathy proposes that self-consciousness and self-centredness create a huge downward spiral in any performance relationship.

“You know ... you can’t walk and think about walking at the same time without tripping. You can’t do anything in front of people if you’re thinking about what you’re doing. In a kind of evaluative way. Some people just cannot suspend the belief that it’s all about them. And that is the key. I think the most fundamental thing is ... just like right now ... I am so much trying to understand what you’re after, what you want, how to give it to you ... so it’s really all about you - which it always is in any authentic conversation. It’s all about the other person and how it is that you could meet them where they are. And they are doing that with you, too - they do ... but the leader has to go first. The speaker has to go first. I think the biggest barrier is that ... if I don’t change my attention from me to them and genuinely onto them ... I doubt that any of this stuff will work” (Kathy, my interview, lines 372 - 381).

Similarly, TAI director Twila Thompson later asserts to me about the work of the actor,

“...when you’re really in the middle of it, there is no perception of self. You are so in relationship with whatever you are creating that you are not assessing ‘what is happening with me?’ [...] in the middle of it, there is much less perception of self, you become more the vehicle, if you will. Or maybe it’s even that you are so unified with what you’re creating that there is no separation” (Twila, my interview, lines 658 - 665).

Twila also expresses that her own work as a coach sometimes resembles a channelling process:

“It felt like I was channelling something. And people would say, ‘Oh that was powerful, can you do that again?’ - ‘What did I say??’ I got to the point where I would say, ‘Tape me!’ so that we could capture it, because I would be so focused on what was happening in the room and something would come out that was powerful but I was so in the middle of it that I couldn’t remember it afterwards” (ibid, lines 667 - 672).

As the people of TAI share with me their understanding of the working processes I am deeply reminded of my heuristic research journey - the similarities are striking.

“It is a process of immersion, it’s a process of being with the other to be more fully with one’s self. It’s really discovering the other and by doing so, learning more about one’s self. That’s the core of the method as I understand it. Like a homecoming ... like Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*. Like T.S. Eliot’s famous phrase, ‘We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.’” (Jessica, in my interview with Kathy & Gifford, lines 785 - 791).



Kathy further describes a paradox which seems to lie at the heart of the encounter with the other.

“...the presumption is that you already have something vitally interesting to offer. [...] I’m offering that to the audience and, lo and behold, the audience is interested, even though it is my experience. So, I think what happens is that life ... the more specific and particular and unique I can be in the describing of something, the more universally it applies! It’s a paradox” (Kathy, my interview lines 838 - 845).

She expands,

“The thing we do in *Power & Presence* is ... you know, there is a great divide in most people’s minds between who they are and the work they do. And I feel fortunate enough ... who I am and what I do is much more isomorphic than for most people. But ... but what I believe is happening on the second day of *Power & Presence* is the state dawning ... that, Oh my God, now ... here’s the paradox: I need to use myself as an instrument ... I am the message. It’s not that it’s all about me in the sense of self-consciousness or ego gratification ... it’s that I am responsible for who I am in this process called presenting. And most people think it’s what they know how to do, it’s their subject matter expertise, it’s their experience, it’s their intellect ... they don’t have any idea that who they are ... IS the main event!” (ibid, lines 880 - 889).

### ***Transform the heat!***

“I recognise that ‘being out there’ with the audience takes courage. I know so from experience, but I can also perceive it in each participant as s/he takes centre stage. Gifford is the first to admit the courage it takes to bear the heat of an audience. Taking this heat and working with it ... to transform it ... to affirm it ... to liberate it ... is not easy, because it involves risk. It involves an unavoidable level of self-exposure. Being an open and connected speaker means being a vulnerable speaker. And that is scary. Each speaker has to burst his/ her own bubble. [...] Gifford and Kathy are masters at recognising bubbles. ‘If it happens within you ... it happens within me,’ Gifford explains. Audiences mirror presenters or performers. ‘If you don’t breathe ... we don’t.’ Mirroring ... another concept important in TAI’s approach” (Jessica, *Power & Presence* Diary, lines 148 - 159).

Gifford who relates much to the work of Joseph Campbell suggests that *Communicating with Power and Presence* takes participants on a hero’s journey. “It takes them from a place of comfort and then they go through the gates of hell and then they find out that they can be there and still live and come back” (Gifford, my interview, lines 185 - 187).

Occasionally, Gifford and Kathy have had to deal with clients who couldn't bear the heat. Some people find it hard to switch their attention from the content of their presentation to the craft of relating the material. One client "really tried to maintain her professional image. And ... it was just such a different paradigm what we were asking her to do ... that she fainted! [...] and so we stopped and we revived her and we continued on ... making sure that she was OK, of course. We were asking her to do something which just didn't make sense in her brain" (ibid, lines 394 - 404).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

More often than not Kathy and Gifford have clients who struggle to drop into their impulses, who are caught up in the head, who are entangled in their own beliefs about how their performance should look and feel.

"...this happens in acting classes all the time, people who want to be actors but are so stuck in the form of how it 'should look' that they're just fake. And they don't know how to drop into their impulses. We call it going onto an emotional river ... where you start with the emotion and you let it take you to wherever. [...] And so, these are the elements we're dealing with in the corporate world - we don't call them the same way, but they are exactly the same elements" (Gifford, my interview, lines 457 - 463).

The work with audience heat is central in TAI's approach. As a performer, I know that in front of any audience there is heat, the collective gaze burns. I'm reminded of the ritual work practised by ParaTheatrical ReSearch, Berkeley.

"In paratheatrical work heat is of prime importance. It fuels the ritual process. Saying this, whilst TAI's approach is to work with the heat of an audience ... paratheatre effectively abolishes the audience. In paratheatre, heat is generated through intense physical warm-up and through committed engagement with one's own projections onto the surrounding space. Whilst in TAI, speakers project onto their audience, in paratheatre, performers project onto the space" (Jessica, Power & Presence Diary, lines 210 - 216).

### ***On working with the Unconscious.***

Kathy proposes that *Communicating with Power and Presence* may trigger the surfacing of shadow material in any participant.

"You get to see your defence mechanisms in vibrant reality because you're standing there ... all by yourself ... and you're laughing hysterically, crying, shaking

... you see your fears ... and what you do to take care of yourself also shows up. You know, the first time I came here ... Gifford wouldn't let me talk. So, the way I take care of myself when I'm anxious is to talk. At a very fundamental level. So, what's it like for me to stand and just be. And I had to be willing to go there and see what's that about. So, there is this discovery that is very Jungian and it's hard" (Kathy, my interview, lines 467 - 474).

The triggering of unconscious material strikes me as connected to clients dropping out of their thinking minds and into the body.

### ***On the Spirit of the Work.***

Gifford proposes that the work which unfolds within *Communicating with Power and Presence*, as well as within other TAI programmes, is about each person's energy or spirit, as well as the collective spirit of a group. Gifford hesitates using the term 'spiritual' when describing the work, for it can imply "The Other. A big Other that's out there in the sky" (Gifford, my interview, lines 532). Similarly, Kathy asserts that her work is not esoteric.

"Hank [Kathy's collaborator at the Cramer Institute, JB] was saying to me today, [...] 'You know, maybe it's the spiritual side of leadership?' and I said, 'No' because it takes people in the wrong direction. It's the spirit within. It's the spirit that permeates every single ounce of energetic force, whatever you want to call it, all the time ... and to me it's not esoteric" (Kathy, my interview, lines 550 - 554).

Gifford and Kathy agree that what they are doing is "of this world'. It is accessible all the time" (ibid, lines 538 - 539).

Nonetheless, Gifford acknowledges that some spiritual practices are closely aligned to the approach of TAI. "There are spiritual realms that are very much like what we're doing. Philosophies, ways of life ... I mean, is Buddhism a religion? Or is it a way of life? Somebody said to me, 'You're bringing Buddhism to the masses'" (Gifford, my interview, lines 562 - 564 ). Gifford elucidates that TAI connects people to a "way of living. This way of being present in the moment. This way of understanding how we're all interconnected. This way of understanding that something bigger can be expressed through you ... if you just be" (ibid, lines 574 - 576).

Kathy refers to the popular etymology of the word 'religion', *religare* (Latin, 'to bind fast' - sometimes the word is also connected to *relegare*, Latin, 'to read again'). Kathy suggests that the work can bring individuals and groups back to what is true - and when this happens, the work can take on a holy quality.

“There is a reverence. There is a moment where people know that this is touching the profound. Now ... that doesn't always happen. [...] BUT it's the stance that this is available and that this IS. [...] - it's an actually lived experience. It's not an idea, not a wish, not a promise. There is a knowing that takes place. In French there are two forms of the word 'to know'. And this one is about becoming familiar ... with this energy that is always available all of the time. This connectedness. So, you are immersed in it and you have the experience. And it's that form of knowing, the experiential knowing rather than the other form of knowing which is more intellectual” (Kathy, my interview, lines 594 - 602).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

## **The Creative Dynamic**

*The Creative Dynamic* is the second of TAI's foundation programmes. It unfolds over two and a half days, and it is the latest, most advanced incarnation of TAI's original core programme *The Mastery of Acting* which was originally conceived in 1977 by Dan Fauci and Ted Danson. In 1987 Dan Fauci moved to California, leaving TAI in the hands of Allen Schoer, Twila Thompson and Gifford Booth - but it was not until 2000 that he severed all links with the company. As part of the severance process Twila and Gifford re-assessed the content and impact of *The Mastery* and re-fashioned it as *The Creative Dynamic*.

In the following I shall depict the programme's structure and content, whilst also reflecting on my personal experience of *The Creative Dynamic*. Throughout the workshop I was struck by the strong resemblance with *Communicating with Power & Presence*, and so I focus here on the key features which distinguished *The Creative Dynamic* from the other foundation programme. The depiction is based on my own workshop diary, as well as on interviews with Elise and Twila.

### **Towards artistic growth**

At the time I participated in *The Creative Dynamic*, the programme was facilitated by coaches **Sam Carter** and **Elise DeRosa**. Elise was the lead coach of the workshop, whilst Sam was co-facilitating *The Creative Dynamic* for the very first time.

**Sam Carter** is now Senior European Coach for TAI. He has worked extensively with senior leaders from Fortune 500 Companies on the issues of presence, creativity, and leadership. He is also a contributing author to the book *Power Speaking* published in 2006. Sam holds degrees in theater and communications from New York University, The London Academy, and the ETW Conservatoire in Paris where he studied with Philippe Petit, as well as members of the Theatre du Soleil Company.

Sam Carter  
Photo supplied by TAI.

**Elise DeRosa**, Director of Programmes at TAI, has been immersed in the performing arts for as long as she can remember. She started acting with *The Theater Project*, a community theatre in Brunswick, Maine, at the age of nine, and during her high school years she founded *The Young Company*, a group of high school and college actors who created their own works as well as performing works from the theatre repertory.

Elise DeRosa  
Photo supplied by TAI.

After high school Elise enrolled at State University of New York in New Paltz to study Theatre Arts. It was here that she first encountered TAI at the age of 19 when Gifford Booth and Twila Thompson came to the university to facilitate *The Mastery of Acting*. Seven years later, following extensive freelance performance work, Elise carved her way into TAI and became a facilitator of the Creative Dynamic.

## **Working principles**

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

### ***On presence and the suspension of judgement.***

Throughout The Creative Dynamic we are encouraged to work on becoming more present and to adopt a non-judgemental attitude towards the other participants and working processes.

Elise repeatedly emphasises that “seeing what’s in front of me is the first and foremost thing” (Elise, my interview, line 459). In my workshop diary I elaborate,

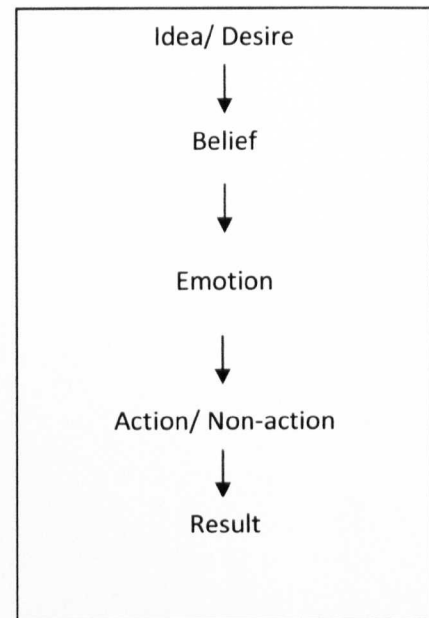
“To be present means ‘seeing without judging, without labelling, without naming’. Elise and Sam highlighted ‘breath’ as an effective means to ground a person and help that person become more centred and aware. I’m reminded of various meditation practices which have similar aims: to detach, to observe without judgement, to focus awareness, to stop oneself from immediate ‘reaction’. We experiment with this by describing objects in the room without naming them - an exercise which I also encountered in Power & Presence. When describing objects we are also asked why they are compelling to us. I perceive that the question gently leads us to adopt an attitude of ‘unconditional positive regard’ - to use a Rogerian term. In the 1940s and 50s humanist psychologist Carl Rogers advocated in psychotherapy and counselling what has become known as the ‘person-centred approach’. This approach is now also applied in the fields of education, social work and corporate management. To treat individuals with ‘unconditional positive regard’, to nurture their processes of personal development and to support their ‘self-actualising tendency’ is one of the hallmark concepts of person-centred philosophy. [...] Once we finished describing the properties of several objects in the room, we turn to describing each other’s shoes and faces. The participants find the description exercises very centring and calming. They express that the exercises are about ‘concentration and seeing complexity’, that they challenge one ‘to see what’s in front of you’, to ‘investigate’. One person comments that ‘if we are truly in relationship we cannot hide.’ To me there is a distinct difference between describing objects in the room and another person’s clothing - and describing another person’s face. I notice that I feel more uncomfortable about describing a face than about my face being described. In retrospect I realise that this is because I want to describe honestly but I also don’t want to offend the person in front of me! Then comes the struggle ... how can I possibly know what the other person will find offensive? The exercise leads me to wonder how neutral and detached our perceptions can really become. Are they not always coloured by our beliefs and concepts of the world? I remember reading Marie-Louise von Franz who emphasised that we live in our own world of projections, from which we can never totally free ourselves. Our beliefs and emotions determine what we perceive on a conscious, egoic level” (Jessica, Creative Dynamic Diary, lines 124 - 165).

### ***On the Creative Dynamic***

Sam and Elise share with us their understanding of the process of creation. We are presented with a flipchart graph which depicts the dynamic of creation as a series of interlocking elements:

The graph is explained to us as follows:

“We have an idea or a desire to create something. Attached to this desire is a particular belief about this desire, whether we are likely to realise it or not, whether it’s going to be difficult or not, whether it is something we are capable of doing or not ... the beliefs are as varied as the persons who have them. Attached to the beliefs are emotions. We feel about this desire or idea in a particular way. Elise and Sam focus on common self-limiting beliefs and emotions. They emphasise that the beliefs and emotions attached to a particular desire then lead to either action or non-action towards this desire which in turn leads towards a positive or negative result.



The bottom line: We are creators all the time: we manifest our world according to our beliefs - self-limiting or self-liberating. Elise also emphasises that we have a natural tendency to re-enforce our emotions and beliefs. She suggests that on a physiological level emotions don’t last, unless we re-enforce them. We re-enforce emotions, we invest ourselves in emotions, we become attached to them” (ibid, lines 206 - 217).

In her interview with me Elise further asserts, “We become so attached to them [emotions, JB] and see them as facts - when they’re not facts. They are just something that runs through our body” (Elise, my interview, lines 751 - 752). Elise suggests that actors “have to be able to access these emotions and they have to be able to turn them on and off. Like a faucet” (Elise, my interview, lines 773 - 774). In other words, actors connect to emotions and express them - but they don’t attach to them. Instead they become vehicles, channels.

From Elise’s and Sam’s description of the creative process I extrapolate that the aim of *The Creative Dynamic* is to dispel self-limiting beliefs ... to replace them with self-actualising beliefs which may help us turn our desires into reality. In interview Elise affirms

“We are a screaming ball of desire” (ibid, line 292) ... and yet “We don’t really give ourselves the time and space to say, ‘This is what I want.’ Instead we often look at all the limiting thoughts and beliefs that we have about those desires and just walk around unsatisfied all the time. [...] In *The Creative Dynamic*, it’s all about looking at those desires instead of the limiting beliefs - which is 99% of the journey” (ibid, lines 253 - 259).

Throughout the workshop I had mixed feelings about the proposed model of creation. I am concerned that we may be simplifying the matter.

“For me, crucial questions remain: How much do we need to drive the process of creation and how much do we need to let go and follow deeper impulses within? How much control do we have over the processes of creation in which we are involved? Are we the foremost creators of our lives or are we partaking in a process of creation which is driven by a greater force, unconscious, universal, divine? - It is one thing to recognise and address self-limiting beliefs and behaviour patterns. It is another to postulate that we can bring into being whatever we may desire. Important to me here is the differentiation between perhaps more superficial desires and deeper self-actualisation needs, as defined by Abraham Maslow. I believe that The Creative Dynamic aims to support the latter - but no differentiation is made?” (Jessica, Creative Dynamic Diary, lines 227 - 235).

In interview with Elise we take a second look at the dynamic of creation. Elise believes that our desires are tremendously powerful. They are generative. She also asserts that attention plays an important role in the process of creation. We attract into our lives and create within our lives whatever we focus on, and self-limiting beliefs can exert an inhibitory influence. - Yet Elise also describes to me how she attracted the role of Puck when she auditioned for the Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival: she was cast as Puck even though she thought she would never get the role and at the time of the audition she wasn't even reading Puck - she was reading other parts instead. Puck came into Elise's life, even though she thought “that I would never be able to play [...] an androgynous character because I am so obviously not androgynous. I'm just too well endowed” (Elise, my interview, lines 326 - 328). Nonetheless, Elise had a strong desire to play the part: “I always thought that this was a character that I'd be perfect in playing and that I really felt well connected to” (ibid, lines 331 - 332). Could it be that Elise's underlying desire for Puck was stronger than her self-limiting thoughts that she would never attain the role? And could it be that her conscious 'letting go of Puck' helped her get the part? What is the role of the dynamic interplay between conscious and unconscious processes in creation?

As for differentiating between superficial desires and deeper self-actualisation needs, Elise affirms that the focus needs to be on “who you are” (ibid, line 375), “your purpose in life” (ibid). The process of creation is not simply about wanting to win the lottery and promptly racking in the cash. Gifford also speaks of personal vision and affirms,

“...what we call your personal vision ... is something, **some thing**, flowing through you ... that wants to express itself through you. Included in that is your wants, your tastes ... one of the ways that vision - it's an imprecise word and an imprecise way to talk about it but let me see if I can do it - so, vision exits in you and each of us has a unique vision. When you let go of the shoulds, when you let go of your 'here is how I have to do it' ... when you surrender to vision ... desires will form, also the way to accomplish those desires will manifest, so it is about



letting go. It is about surrendering to something inside you” (Gifford, my interview, lines 973 - 980).

Amplifying the meaning and purpose of desires, as well as reflecting on the issue of attachment to desires, Gifford elaborates,

“...the truth is you need to let go and let it take the time that it needs to take. So, there is pain involved with desire, and there is pain involved with thinking that it should be done in the certain way. If you continuously surrender, if you continue to let it unfold ... there is pain cause shit happens, but there is joy, there is love, there is passion, life. Sure, desires can be painful - but really, the pain comes from our beliefs about our desires. That we think we can't have them, or we shouldn't have them, or they will never happen. [...] It's not, you're not being given desires that can't be fulfilled. Let them be fulfilled in a way ... let IT uncover the way they can be fulfilled. [...] In terms of creativity, I used to think that when I was making a piece of art I had to sit and think it up and then execute it in a way that was specifically how I thought it was. Until I realised that I could think up a piece of art ... and that was the part that just got me into action. Then, when I got into relationship with my material and the art piece itself, it would tell me what it wanted and my final product would then come out in a way that it wanted to be. So, there was a surrender in that process. [...] So, I'm sure this PhD has written you - as opposed to you writing it. It has told you what it wants” (ibid, lines 1005 - 1027).

Gifford concludes that following one's personal vision means to follow and to enact whatever is “in integrity and in congruency with who you are” (ibid, line 1066). Referencing Ernest Holmes, he adds, “...desire is the thing itself. In incipency, waiting for you to reach out and grab it. So, if you have a desire, it is there already, and it's your job to reach out and make it yours. Own it. Say 'yes' to it” (ibid, lines 1095 - 1097).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

### ***On working with the body.***

Following another verbal check-in Elise and Sam take us through a brief physical warm-up. The chairs have been pushed to the edges of the room and we are moving freely, playing games which one would encounter in any acting class. The group appear to take delight in the exercises. I, however, experience the physical work with mixed feelings.

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Several months after the workshop I noted in my diary that I had come to TAI following several intense physical theatre trainings with some of the original actors who worked at Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre in Poland in the 1970s; and I had also taken part in an

incredibly challenging selection process at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera, Italy. My experiences in Pontedera had been very moving and confusing:

“I had experienced the most beautiful and potent, even sacred theatre practice on the one hand and the most cold and aggressive practitioners on the other hand. There is no doubt in my mind now that these intense experiences were colouring my perceptions of *The Creative Dynamic*. From Mario Biagini at the Workcenter I had received the understanding that authentic performance required the most intense and dedicated training, that true mastery could only be achieved if one works relentlessly, day in, day out, ten hours at a time, few breaks, sweat dripping from almost naked bodies in black bathing suits, songs sang for several hours, always in search of deeper connection, always in search of a deeper vitality. I am not exaggerating. I had experienced that ... and here I was, now in with TAI, back in Acting 101. I had been so in awe of the Workcenter - and at the same time I had been repulsed. I had experienced Mario’s behaviour towards the selection participants as arrogant and dismissive. I had left the Workcenter, deeply longing for the work but realising that I could not engage in it with Mario as my lead. I had been mourning for the training which I felt I required but which I could not and did not want to pursue under the given circumstances” (ibid, lines 366 - 382).

It was with such experience that I had entered into *The Creative Dynamic*. I was further able to articulate the contrasting values of the Workcenter and TAI in my diary:

“Now, after some months of distance and incubation I am in a different place. Now, I question if such intensive training as I experienced it in Italy is really necessary. It may be necessary for some, but I don’t think that we all have to become athletes to be truthful and graceful masters of our craft. Train we must - but all to our own constitution, purpose and potential. Now, I can also see more clearly the value of *The Creative Dynamic*. Elise and Sam, you and your colleagues, I feel, are all such deeply caring and compassionate people. Ultimately, what could be more important? And of what value is the Workcenter’s brilliance if it is not shared with the world with compassion and a sense of service?” (ibid, lines 384 - 392).

*The Creative Dynamic* does not push the participants in the same way as the Workcenter in Italy pushed performers in its selection process. Elise and Sam focus on what is working, what is flowing, enabling each person to engage with the physical components of the training in a way that makes them feel at ease. For me, however, the physical work is too easy. I delight in very challenging physical work.

“I want to create, play with the group. I want to dance, sing, splash paint on floor, walls and ceiling, let my body be the brush, my blood the paint, unleash the Dionysus within! Let the inner alchemical process begin, let us slip and slide into

this marvellous land which lies just beyond our ordinary sense of self, through Aldous Huxley's *reducing valve* like Alice through the tunnel into Wonderland..." (ibid, lines 486 - 491).

I guess that I am a rather unusual customer? I remind myself not to make my own experiences the yardstick for an inappropriate evaluation! After all, some of the other participants in my group were in there sixties and seventies...

Nonetheless, I sense that the body plays a vital role in my exploration of creativity - and I still feel that the physical components of *The Creative Dynamic* were somewhat lacking in depth and rigour. I sense that the rigour I seek is not one measured by physical exertion as one may encounter it at the Workcenter, I sense further that it has little to do with the unconditional positive regard which TAI coaches display. No, the rigour I seek lies elsewhere. We have already established that creativity requires presence. Twila further elucidates, "...the quickest way to get people to be present is to get you into your body [...]. That it is not just a mechanism to carry your brain around! I think you experience a creative impulse physically first, whether you're aware of it or not. Something happens physically and then all of a sudden you have a thought or an idea" (Twila, my interview, lines 330 - 334). For me, the rigour lies precisely here: in the work with physical impulses ... to pull back the curtain ... and to make unconscious processes more available to consciousness. Can such making conscious be achieved in an environment where words dominate? Graeme Thomson (feedback by email, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2009) reminds me that "'experiential' shifts in the body are not necessarily prompted by physical activity. Things can be 'experienced' by our full range of sensory capabilities in a way which will be 'experiential' rather than cognitive. One of our roles as collaborator with the client is to raise the level of listening and awareness for the things that matter and then show the client how he/she can listen and then what to do with all this information..." In his free association procedure Freud used verbal play to enable his clients to access the Unconscious. Similarly, Surrealist writers played with language to enter into a state of *pure psychic automatism*, that is an attunement of egoic thought. Here lies the crux: Within *The Creative Dynamic*, as I experienced it, there was only occasional attunement of egoic thought. Only in our individual performances were we challenged to suspend our natural self-centredness.

### ***On performance.***

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

The other participants are coached through the performance process. They are instructed to ground themselves, to keep breathing, to connect with their audience, to investigate their audience, to take it one thought at a time - all working principles which I had also encountered in *Communicating with Power & Presence*. Like Kathy and Gifford, Elise asserts that the role of the coaches in this process is that of a mirror.

"I am present with the participants and I am listening to them, I'm seeing them and responding to them. I'm available and I think that's the big key. As coaches all of us are available ... we are there and present and nowhere else. We reflect back if the participant stayed with us and what kind of impact they were creating. What kind of results they're getting. As kind of an outside eye ... and keeping them accountable. [...] That's the big thing: accountability. [As performers] [W]e can say that we want to create something and then we put out something else over and over again. We're saying that we want to create 'blue' and what we're putting out is 'red' ..." (Elise, my interview, lines 688 - 695).

Elise puts such incongruence of a performer down to lack of awareness, particularly a lack of physical awareness.

"...it's a really difficult thing to have that level of self-awareness and insight into our actions and into what it is that we're putting out there into the world. And we're really, really bad at giving ourselves feedback. We have a whole series of perceptions that we walk around with which are often in complete opposition to what is actually showing up in the room. So, what we do as coaches is to just reflect back what's showing up in the room" (ibid, lines 705 - 709).

Projections. Our awareness and perception is clouded by a constant stream of projections. As Elise puts it, "We're walking around with all these stories that we tell ourselves. All these beliefs, thoughts, perceptions ... and they're often a fog that gets in the way of our actually seeing what is in front of us, what we're actually working with" (ibid, lines 722 - 724).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.3 for full material\*

# *Ang Gey Pin and the Workcenter*

## *Theatre as Vehicle*

My PhD journey began with Jerzy Grotowski. I followed the Grotowski trail, from its beginnings in the *Theatre of Productions*, to *Paratheatre*, to *Theatre of Sources*, *Objective Drama* and finally *Art as Vehicle*. From the beginning I sensed that the work Grotowski explored towards the end of his life was highly relevant to my research, and I was keen to meet the practitioners who were continuing this work today, at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera, Italy.

Anyone who has reached out towards the Workcenter knows how difficult it can be to penetrate. I have to date not received any permission from the Workcenter to depict their practice in my thesis. I am no longer seeking permission. The Workcenter is not officially a co-researcher in this research project. Nonetheless, in May 2007 I had a brief opportunity to experience the Workcenter's approach in action, when the centre issued a call for artists to apply for the *Open Program*. I sent in an application and was invited to the selection session. My experience of this session had a profound impact on me, which I would like to share with the reader - if only to illuminate my thought processes and references to the Workcenter in other parts of the thesis.

From my desire to engage with the Workcenter arose an encounter with Ang Gey Pin, a former member of the centre who worked in *Art as Vehicle* for nearly a decade. My brief encounter with Gey Pin has been highly instructive. I worked with her in a ten-day workshop in April 2007 (keeping handwritten workshop notes which have informed this depiction, these available on request) and I interviewed her for my research (see **APPENDIX H.2**). Her diligent transmission, albeit within short bursts of time, forms much of the basis of this depiction.

## The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards

The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski was founded in 1986 at the invitation of the Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale of Pontedera, Italy (now: Fondazione Pontedera Teatro). Grotowski arrived in Pontedera from the University of California, Irvine, where he had conducted the Focused Research Program in Objective Drama. Grotowski continued to teach at U.C.-Irvine until 1992, however, from 1986 Grotowski mainly worked in Pontedera.

In Italy, Grotowski moved from the exploration of Objective Drama to the territory of *Art as Vehicle*, or ritual arts. Art as Vehicle is a natural extension and progression of Objective Drama which was concerned with the investigation of ancient ritual techniques, i.e. "elements of performative movements, dances, songs, incantation, structures of language, rhythms and the use of space" (in Wolford, 1997b, pp. 328 - 329), and their objective impact upon the practitioner's inner life and state of energy. "When I speak of ritual, I am referring neither to a ceremony nor a celebration, and even less to an improvisation with the participation of people from the outside. Nor do I speak of a synthesis of different ritual forms coming from different places. When I refer to ritual, I speak of its objectivity; this means that the elements of the Action are the instruments to work *on the body, the heart and the head of the doers*" (Grotowski in Richards, 1995, p. 122). Grotowski dedicated the last thirteen years of his life to the study and refinement of such ritual.

Grotowski's main disciple became Thomas Richards whom he had met in 1984 at U.C.-Irvine. Richards first worked as Grotowski's assistant but soon became Grotowski's essential collaborator, to whom Grotowski transmitted the fruits of his lifetime of study. In 1996 Jerzy Grotowski decided to change the name of the Workcenter to the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards to reflect this deep collaboration; and since the death of Grotowski in 1999 the artistic development of the Workcenter has been in the hands of Richards who has become the official heir to Jerzy Grotowski's legacy.

Since the foundation of the Workcenter in 1986, Italian performer Mario Biagini has also been one of the central members of the research team. Alongside Richards, he is the Associate Director of the centre and he led Project *The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts* (1999 to 2006), which aimed to sculpt a bridge between the centre's long-term investigations in Art as Vehicle and performative events which by necessity unfold in relationship with an audience. Biagini was the primary director of *One Breath Left* and of *Dies Irae: The Preposterous Theatrum Interioris Show*, in both of which Ang Gey Pin performed lead roles. In 2007, he began the supervision of the *Open Program* which sustains the aims of Project *The Bridge* to create publicly accessible performances which keep alive the subtle interior process characteristic of Art as Vehicle. It is Mario Biagini whom I met in my encounter with the Workcenter in 2007

when I attended the selection session for the Open Program. Thomas Richards, like his theatrical father, remains a man whom I have never met.

## Ang Gey Pin

Singapore artist Ang Gey Pin began her theatre career at Practice Theatre Ensemble in Singapore in 1986. Her drive to gain deeper knowledge of Asian performing arts traditions first led her to the University of Hawaii-Manoa, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre with distinction in 1992. Around the same time, Gey Pin first encountered Grotowski in his final Objective Drama session at U.C.-Irvine. Gey Pin undertook a one-year apprenticeship at the Workcenter between 1994 and 1995, after which she returned to Singapore and founded Theatre OX. As the company's leader, Ang led in-depth research into ancient texts and songs of Chinese tradition, Tai Chi, drumming and meditation.

Ang Gey Pin in *One breath left*.  
Sourced from: [www.theworkcenter.org](http://www.theworkcenter.org)

Alongside her colleagues of Theatre Ox, Gey Pin returned to the Workcenter in 1998, participating in a selection session, and to their surprise the entire group was invited to stay as a resident company for one year. As Theatre Ox became integrated into the Workcenter Gey Pin became involved in Project: *The Bridge*, and she performed in *One breath left* (1998 - 2002) and *Dies Irae* (2003 - 2006).

In April 2006, not long after I witnessed *Dies Irae* in Vienna, Gey Pin decided to leave the Workcenter and continue her work independently. Shortly after she left the Workcenter, she began to offer public 'worksessions' for performers from Italy and abroad. It was during such a worksession from 13<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007 that I encountered Gey Pin in practice. During the time with Gey Pin I worked alongside nine other performers, some of whom had worked with Gey Pin before, and some of whom were completely new to the work. Our encounter took place at Casa Laboratorio Vallenera, a small centre outside the town of Lugnano in Teverina, 100 kilometres north of Rome.

As part of the worksession we pursued four areas of investigation with deepening intensity: We explored playful engagement with physical exercises, we worked on individual songs, as well as individual and group acting propositions, and we practiced Tai Ji and a range of physical exercises which Gey Pin diligently transmitted to us.

### **On working with the Tanden**

In the mornings of our workshop Gey Pin taught us sequences from her own Tai Ji practice. We repeated these sequences for about an hour each day, whilst Gey Pin continuously corrected our postures and the execution of our movements. Gey Pin paid particular attention to the origin of our movements which should come from our physical centre of gravity, the 'Dāntián' in Chinese. The principle of moving from the centre of the body was familiar to me from my Aikido practice in which, as in Tai Ji, all action is initiated from the centre, 'Tanden' in Japanese. Following Tai Ji, we practiced a series of exercises which aimed to strengthen the core of our bodies whilst encouraging relaxation and transmission from the centre to the periphery of the body.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.4 for full material\*

### **On playing with physical exercises**

From day one, Gey Pin further encouraged us to find individual exercises which would focus on and strengthen the weak areas of our bodies. She challenged us to work precisely, to focus on specific muscle groups. I remember being sent off on day one to work with some of the more seasoned workshop participants. Here, somewhat unsure of what was expected, I decided to focus on the muscles in my stomach and thighs which I perceived as my weak areas. I then chose two exercises from a repertoire of dynamic poses which I knew from my work in Iyengar Yoga: Virabhadrasana, the warrior pose and Navasana, the boat pose.

When I came to work on these exercises with Gey Pin, it became clear to me that she was not looking for the conscious, slow execution of Yoga poses. Neither was she looking for rhythmic and repetitive exercise as one might find it in a gym. Instead, she asked us to approach our physical exercises in a more playful and organic way, whilst pushing us to be ruthlessly precise and rigorous in our work. As Gey Pin explained to me in interview,

"playing is better than going through an exercise 20, 30 times - that's very dull. [...] at the Workcenter I was all the time confronting the life in each exercise. How to find life in the contact and response with each person in the game. Of course



we still need to accomplish if it is for the stomach, the legs and so on without changing the exercise but we have to look for that kind of game contact” (Gey Pin, my interview, lines 191 - 198).

Quickly, my chosen Yoga poses lost their sharp postural definition and became more fluid and animated - without losing their essential purpose and qualities. My primary focus shifted from the execution of the postures ... to being in an authentic relationship with the space and my working colleagues; and the execution of the exercises unfolded as a result of this relationship. We played with each other. It was a play driven by the body, not the mind. Our play triggered associations, sensations, images, memories. Gey Pin asked us to follow those associations, to live them and give them expression, without losing ourselves in them. Sometimes our physical play resembled the game ‘Follow the Leader’ - however, not at any time were we to copy exactly what the leader was doing - but instead we were asked to observe and receive the leader and let our bodies respond to the impulses provided by the leader. Whilst our play was physically demanding and vigorous it was to unfold in silence: Gey Pin asked of us that there be no heavy footsteps on the floor, no loud breathing or other sounds. Although she was probably ten years older than most of us, Gey Pin approached the work with a remarkable quality of lightness and childlike grace, a grace which I believe arises from years of disciplined practice and which comes with the thorough mastery of a craft.

I found that Gey Pin’s work seemed to unfold along axes of opposing directions. Staying in relationship with one’s outer working environment whilst being attentive to and following one’s inner associations and impulses was one such set of seemingly paradoxical instructions. It demanded from us a double arrow of attention, a cultivation of simultaneous awareness of outer circumstances and inner impulses both of which were forever changing, fluctuating in response to one another.

I experienced this aspect of the physical work as highly demanding and at times frustrating. I struggled to become fully absorbed and to remain attentive, in part because the play with physical exercises was carried out indoors in Grotowski style attire: We were wearing only swimming costumes: the women were in bikinis, and our one male colleague was wearing a black brief. The lack of clothing took me outside my comfort zone. I felt self-conscious and inhibited. I didn’t see the necessity for wearing so little. Whilst clothes may add a level of concealment, I don’t believe that they hinder a performer’s presence nor that they block physical impulses - unless they constrain the body in some form. And I didn’t believe that one has to be practically naked to be truly seen.

Furthermore, Gey Pin was constantly intervening, creating so many rules during our work that I found it difficult to pay inward attention and allow the body to voice its organic responses. Apart from being asked not to make any noise on the floor there was to be no vocal

improvisation, no sounds of any kind, our spines must remain straight, and we were not to make physical contact with our colleagues. The rules made me hyper aware - and whilst increased awareness is one of the main aims in this work, self-consciousness is surely not. I tried my best to surrender to the experience. Nonetheless, I found that the rules of engagement often stifled the flow of associations within me: I would try to relate to the space - and Gey Pin would tell me to connect more with my working colleagues. I would connect with my colleagues - and she would tell me that my actions were either too obvious or too vague. I would attempt to pay more attention to my inner stream of life and its articulation - and she would remind me to keep relating to the space. Her directions were relentless.

I believe that Gey Pin wanted to foster within us a very refined form of play - organic, light and subtle - however, play is also rudimentary, stereotypical and primal. I felt that it would have helped me to express the more stereotypical, more crude layers of play before attempting to access and embody the more subtle levels. However, Gey Pin appeared to discourage such gradual work. Her approach stood in stark contrast to the work I had experienced with Antero in The Alchemy Lab where a gradual approach seemed encouraged - and I knew that my experience of The Alchemy Lab profoundly helped me in my training with Gey Pin. The lab had prepared the way ... it had provided me with a runway from which to take off. Now, the only way forward was to stop trying, to surrender and, as Gey Pin asserted, to 'un-prepare'...

### **On working with songs**

Besides the physical work, Gey Pin spent time with us, working on individual songs. This work was carried out in the entire group and it took place in the activity room in the main house. We were asked to wear clothes which were in some way elegant - all the women wore skirts. Each time, Gey Pin would initiate the work, singing songs which I later learned were in Hokkien, a Chinese dialect which Gey Pin's family spoke at home when she was little. As she grew up, Gey Pin lost her connection with Hokkien because Mandarin was spoken at school. Only years later, as part of her artistic research she was prompted by her collaborators to re-familiarise herself with her family's dialect, and the songs became Gey Pin's gateway to her childhood memories, family history and cultural heritage.

In our worksession with Gey Pin, after initiating the work with songs, she predominantly engaged with one person at a time whilst the rest of the group sat at the edges of space, remaining fully present and participating in the song without singing aloud. The task was always to remain fully attentive to the journey of the performer. Similarly, Gey Pin remained in constant relationship with the performer, making eye contact, investigating the performer's

body, searching for physical contractions, sensing when the song was alive and flowing and when it was controlled by the mind and forced by conscious intention.

As in the physical work, the work with songs operated along a continuum of directions, ranging from a focus on diligent craftsmanship to the emphasis of impulse and associative work. Whilst we had to adhere strictly to the melody and tempo-rhythm of a song, we had to surrender to the calling of the song and let it take us where it needed to go. We had to find the song in the body, sensing what it wanted, where it wanted to go. "Keep following!" was the instruction. "Don't listen to yourself singing. Don't be self-indulgent. The details will appear when you dare to live it. The body will react." In moments when we were able to follow the song, it became a river ... and whilst we had to work hard at strengthening the river banks, that is the melody, the pitch, the tempo-rhythm, the underlying breath work, we also had to surrender ourselves to the flow of the water which was unique each time a song was sang, for our psycho-physical condition and process was never the same. Conversely, when our minds were trying to impose intentions on the song, Gey Pin seemed to sense the manipulation. She asserted, that "Actions which are not lived take place in a kind of slow motion ... controlled by the intellect."

Fellow actress and researcher Cláudia Tantinge Nascimento (2009) who interviewed Gey Pin for her own PhD research illuminates how Gey Pin's process of working with songs, as well as physical actions was as much a process of remembering as a process of imagination.

"Ang's retrieval of Hokkien is anchored in her investigation of memory and, at times, her imagination of her family history and heritage. Her accounts of her work process indicate that she actively searched for the faintest memories, such as the use of Hokkien at home when she was a young child, and that on certain occasions she also attempted to imagine the memories of her elders, as when she artistically created what she thought could have been her grandparents' relationship to the songs. It was in her body, in her use of voice and language, that both spectrums of memory - actual and imagined, personal and familial - could coexist. As Grotowski has described the work of songs with tradition, the actor must 'Listen to the song. The song talks to the sun. The singer asks the sun about his origin. In the same way, as you sing the song, ask this question from the sun: where were you before you were born?' [...] When singing Hokkien songs, Ang looked for or tried to imagine memories that belonged not to directly her but to her family members. In so doing, she actively attempted to establish a temporal connection between her own individual experience and her heritage. Thus, on an acting level, Ang's search for personal and familial memories established a link between individual and collective experiences" (p. 68).

In interview with me, Gey Pin and I spoke at length about her work with songs. She described to me her first year at the Workcenter in 1994, during which she explored Art as Vehicle under the guidance of Thomas Richards.

"I remember the singing of some of the songs that we were working with that first year at the Workcenter. You enter another world which is not the melody, not the song, not what I hear outside. It's like a journey and this journey I cannot hear from an outside ear. It's not about the song, it's not about the melody. It's ... there is some technical aspect which we need to confront which is the clarity of the melody, the pitch, the tune - which is always necessary. But then ... there is some journey passing, and this is so complex" (Gey Pin, my interview, lines 72 - 79).

Gey Pin elaborated on the process of singing,

"The song provokes something in us. It's the first step. Then ... maybe there is some kind of deeper part in us that is asking [...] It's a kind of inner conversation. It's like the song becomes a conversation or confrontation. [...] And then on the technical side many times we ask about the tune, the pitch - because there is something linked to our dreams, our nightmares, our situation in life. And we need to face that. So, there is a note that is confronting us in a certain part of our body - and if we pass through that it will become easier" (ibid, lines 121 - 129).

Gey Pin emphasised the role of the body in the process of singing. She related strongly to the Tibetan tradition which, she asserts, promotes bodily self-knowledge - much of which has been lost in the contemporary world. In Tibet, from the second or third year of one's life "they start to see if someone has reincarnated from a past life. And they see how to face death with another kind of attitude. I guess all this relates to deeper human experience which we don't usually talk about in a commercial world that deals with goods" (ibid, lines 98 - 100). Gey Pin emphasised the importance of work with energy points in songs, she specifically referred to the concept of chakras. She also described how bodywork and work with songs involved memory and imagination.

"Each sound if we really sing it well in tune ... it is resonating in a certain part of our spine. [...] That is why it's working on the person. But we mustn't focus too much on the technical part of the song. Too much analysing. As I'm singing my body starts to remember something in the past. And I start to have associations. Images which I don't know where they come from. They could be from my subconscious somewhere. Like a dream" (ibid, lines 111 - 116).

Gey Pin believes that the spontaneous play with physical exercises supports and nourishes the association processes in the work with songs.

"It's like my attention is much more open. And my memory arrives even more. And the associations are much freer. And I start to become freer because I don't need to hold on to any kind of tools ... not even the previous associations like 'OK, now I have ten associations which I will use today...' - No, it will not work.

Planning does not work. So, when I let go I see that next time another ten thousand associations will come” (ibid, lines 198 - 203).

Gey Pin also explained that personal difficulties can act as gates for the work. It’s all a question of “...how to receive the song. When I adjust the spine it’s how not to contract certain parts - or to let that contraction have the space to speak. Because that has been there for a long time” (ibid, lines 271 - 273). Gey Pin uses the metaphor of a door to illustrate the point: “In the work some people take a longer time to understand that this door is just in front of them. Just open it and go! They knock on it for long years - or some never see the door - but we cannot push. It depends on the person. With some if they get a little hit it helps them to go through” (ibid, lines 144 - 147). Whatever the block or difficulty, the challenge is to face it, to expose it, not to hide it. “I have this fear, worry or whatever. If it’s there, it’s there. We cannot avoid fear. We cannot avoid other thoughts that come to us. Even now I am thinking how to not let myself go into a kind of contraction. That is important, approaching the work even in training, in doing our action, in doing our singing of the song” (ibid, lines 254 - 258).

Gey Pin asserted that the singer must also focus on the bigger questions.

What is the value of being in this life? What is the value? I remember one very big national treasure in Singapore, a very big artist. Maybe in his sixties, a very big Buddhist also. I remember he was saying, ‘I need to understand, what this life is before it passes.’ Each day he was working, he was alone for three hours. He said, ‘I need to understand death before it comes.’ And I guess that is the question: What is the value of this life? We are all very busy. We grow up, we have to study, then we have to work, then we get money, buy a house, cars, get married, have children ... but there is something deeper” (ibid, lines 136 - 142).

When asked if the work with songs resembled a spiritual practice, Gey Pin suggested that “if the individual already has a spiritual background that links to a kind of body technique - I’m sure they can make associations to their previous knowledge. And sometimes they enter faster. But it does not mean that they will go further. Sometimes a certain thing can block a person for a very long time” (ibid, lines 151 - 154). Gey Pin recalls her own struggle in working with songs:

“...in the very beginning I remember that I had come from many years singing in a choir in school and I had an instrument from the Chinese orchestra. And when I started theatre I was singing. But still ... it’s so tricky to understand what is blocking a person. You may tap into a song so easily that you know how to sing - but then it starts to go so dry. It’s something else is missing. Maybe one day my inner life is there but then the next day ... it’s not there. Then after third, fourth, fifth, sixth day what happens? I started to sing the song by myself in the head, without hearing. I felt nothing. - But what do you mean, ‘be able to feel the song’, you will not be able to feel it like the first day. Anything is like this, the first

time you can never replace. So, until a certain time I was blocked, because I started to know the songs so well and I sang without knowing myself. Then all the questions came. And the questions would start to block me. Because I wasn't concentrating on singing. So, the major question became ... how to free myself from my mental occupation" (ibid, lines 154 - 165).

Gey Pin initially spent one year at the Workcenter, then left and returned home to Singapore, where she had to attend to other commitments. In the three years which followed she worked alone, trying to unpack what had unfolded at the Workcenter.

"At some point I felt I had failed. I did not really accomplish something which I never understood. And I had not done it well. And in my own training with my theatre group I started to think about what we needed, I started to look for more, some kind of training that involved the body's experience. Like Yoga, meditation, and so on. And Tai Ji as well. Then it is as if I started to understand many things at a long distance - like, wow, there are a whole lot of big worlds that I missed. And that is why I had the intention to return to the Workcenter" (ibid, lines 169 - 175).

Gey Pin returned to the Workcenter in 1998 and worked with Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini until 2006. It was during this time that she finally felt a sense of accomplishment in her work. The work at the centre challenged her on many levels, professional and personal.

"And sometimes these difficulties can pull you down to some part of yourself which is very ugly and hard to see. There were really many difficult moments. [...] But even in that so difficult moment I had to continue the work - and you cannot imagine how the work was teaching me and telling me something of life. My personal associations were revealed through my work in this artistic line, doing my structure of the work, doing the songs. So, what did it give me? It pulled me back from some very dark place many times" (ibid, lines 383 - 389).

Gey Pin describes that her work with songs demands from her that she engage in a paradoxical process of simultaneous 'forgetting and remembering'.

"It's ... a kind of re-learning. Not learning. Going back to something ... So, with the song, once I know the technical aspect of the song ... then I meet the song again. And I guess it happens in life as well. Our friends, old friends, new friends, and even ourselves. Each day you wake up you need to forget something again. Tibetans do this. I wake up. I forget. But how to forget things? Are you crazy? Let's say I go to a place I have been to in the past ... my body remembers. Sure. But also ... how can I manage not to be blocked by this memory? Of course, I remember something - but ... I'm meeting a new friend today. And by practising, really practising, one song becomes thousands of songs because it speaks to another part of me each time. Again the conversation starts if I'm willing to just

drop the topic which is the melody. The key, Jessica, is the practice. It never ends" (ibid, lines 208 - 220).

Gey Pin firmly asserts that there are no fixed ways to approach the work with songs, that each trick or strategy quickly becomes a trap. Speaking from her experience she asserts,

"...the more I forget, the next time I have much more associations and memories, I don't know why" (ibid, lines 318 - 319). "I need to work on the songs and I know which songs I need to work on and I tell myself, 'I forget all these songs now.' Immediately it's the body. I have no one melody coming to me. But of course this melody then comes from me. Then, when I go inside the work I have one thought: just the connection with the people, looking for this today. It's like I face this person and this person is also revealing some personal need. When I faced you I started to have a far association with another person who can be a friend or family ... because of your own interests in body work I feel something" (ibid, lines 235 - 241).

Gey Pin proposes that the paradox of 'forgetting and remembering' is always present. I put it to her that it related to another paradox: that of 'will and grace'. Gey Pin can relate it to her experience.

"I call the song. But really I'm calling for my mama, or for a friend. There is also some grace from memory. When you were with some older person when you were very young or something - and once you call, ah, the person, the song arrives and it's speaking. [...] It's like I do not need to be ashamed anymore. I mean, it's not that you would or not - but many things like this become less. Maybe before I had too many things like 'I'm ashamed' - but the older you are growing you realise you have not so many days left - to feel ashamed of what? And slowly you get some grace there because you do not need to hide too many things. You see in the work people get exposed. You get the chance to be exposed. But it's not to indulge in this. In the work we expose what in the normal social situation we will try to hide. That's why this kind of work is not easy. And it is not for everybody. So, the will, once the calling arrives... the will cannot be there anymore because then I would exert all my will on the friend. The friend will not be what I expect. And the person will not know what I expect from them. That 'will' has to give way. Like in this conversation, we are in some deep love - and you cannot exert some kind of idea, some thinking is there, yes, but you cannot form a love for someone, a deeper love, if you form an idea of that. The idea will kill that possibility of looking and discovering and being this nourishing love" (ibid, lines 277 - 293).

Referring to Asian traditions, Gey Pin also emphasised the importance of the teacher within the work. She described that she discovered many things about herself, only because she had an outside witness who acted as her mirror and who helped her see her work and herself.

Reflecting on her own experience of transmission, Gey Pin suggests that the teacher senses what happens within the student because she or he has gone through similar processes.

“...the form is different - but something of how it is speaking in the person is the same. When I say the same ... look at nature ... like these trees (Gey Pin points at the landscape outside the window). They’re different and they’re the same. For many years I used to think, ‘Wow, how does Thomas know this and that...’ It was as if he had some kind of magic. It felt like he could see my inner life ... and I thought that he could see me thinking ... and then I thought, ‘How can I face him?’ And then ... you see the opening comes from here (Gey Pin points at her heart). If I want to work, what do I need to hide? Why? What? If there is something that was never resolved in my life, it will stay, it will be there and the teacher perceives that” (ibid, lines 402 - 409).

Gey Pin further emphasised that it is important for each student to find the right teacher, so that a relationship of trust could develop. During her second stay at the Workcenter, Gey Pin became one of the lead actors in the performances developed by Project *The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts* which combined Art as Vehicle with theatrical performance. Reflecting on the role of the audience in this work, Gey Pin suggested that it was important for her not to concern herself with the audience and what they might think about her work - but not to block them out either.

“They are watching you. And suddenly you can have that free opening. It’s none of my business to think about how is the work that day. I need only to do it my way and go with it. It’s not even about the other actors’ work - that’s none of my business, either. The interest is just on my work in that one hour. It really becomes for me more than theatre. It’s no more that I am an actress performing for an audience. It’s not a theatre piece. It’s more inner work. Yes, the audience adds another level. I need to work not to reject any of these people, even if I don’t know who is here today. That contraction when the actor goes into the theatre and sees the audience and says, ‘Oh my god...’ and the mind starts to talk a lot, that’s the worst of contraction. It’s not about these people. When I started working I was so afraid ... but so afraid about what? What did I care about? There is a process of un-preparing. It’s a meditation” (ibid, lines 348 - 357).

For me, the work with songs was perhaps the most liberating element of the worksession with Gey Pin.

**\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.4 for full material\***

When she first asked me to sing, I did not know what I could sing. I had no repertoire of songs like she and some of the participants did. I knew a few Sanskrit mantras because I had developed an interest in meditation and chanting and I knew fragments of old German folk songs and lullabies which had been sung in my family when I was little. However, the first song



which came to me as I worked with Gey Pin was neither ancient nor deeply embedded in my childhood life. It was a pop song called *Fallen* (German for 'falling') by the German band *Pur* which was very popular amongst young people during the 1990s. The song had come to me in my late teens when my parents were going through divorce. Being the oldest child in the family I had become caught up in the separation drama, trying to mediate between my parents and experiencing the full force of their emotional turmoil. *Fallen* found me during this very difficult time and it became my mantra. It was a song which spoke of hope, love and faith in the face of devastation, loneliness and loss. I was nineteen, I sang *Fallen*, I let myself fall and I flew like a bird. My trust in the world and in myself and my abilities was deeply rooted. The severe outer circumstances with which I was faced during those turbulent times of my life helped me to become more self-reliant, independent and free. I completed my A-levels, I went to university to study Germany Literature and Philosophy, but then followed an inner calling to change direction toward the Performing Arts. I applied for a number of drama schools in Germany, as well as for the famous Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts which was known in Germany as the Paul McCartney University - I was accepted and my life changed. I sang *Fallen*, and it brought me to LIPA. As the lyrics of *Fallen* say,

"Ich mach die Augen zu und lasse mich fallen, ich weiss, Du fängst mich auf.  
Ich dreh mich im Kreis mit verbundenen Augen, bis Du mir die Richtung zeigst."

*I close my eyes and let myself fall, I know that you will catch me.*

*I turn in a circle, eyes bound shut, until you show me the way.*

When I worked with Gey Pin, *Fallen* came to me ... and I was able to let go. And as I surrendered, crying and shaking, I paid attention to nothing but my service of the song. My throat decontracted, my larynx opened and the song began to move through me, speak through me and fill the spaces within me and around me with a deep resonance.

My feeling of liberation lasted only a moment - then 'I' stepped back in, trying to maintain the opening ... and failing. But 'I' had surrendered long enough that Jessica had caught a profound glimpse of the possibilities of working with songs. Working with Gey Pin over the following days I explored other songs which I learned from my iPod during our breaks. Over time, I slowly discovered more depth in each song, realising that each single note in a melody was a gateway to the deeper meeting which I had experienced in my initial moment of surrender. In each note there was a microcosm so vast that one could live in it. To live the songs was the aim and the journey.

It was on day eight of the training that Gey Pin told me that I needed to find a way to 'un-prepare' myself. She sensed that I had become caught up in trying. I had found a way and I

had experienced an opening and I was now attempting to retrace my steps, repeating a way of singing. Gey Pin advised me that instead I should keep on searching. For there was no way - there was only the question. The search. The surrender to the mystery.

### **On working with propositions**

At the time of my joining Gey Pin's worksession I knew that my application letter to the Workcenter had been accepted and that I would be taking part in a selection session in Pontedera within weeks of working with Gey Pin. The Workcenter had requested that we prepare two acting propositions: The first should be based on fifteen lines of text taken from Samuel Beckett's (1954/1999) *Texts for Nothing*. The second should be a structured and repeatable étude on one of the characters in J.D. Salinger's works. For this second proposition I chose to focus on Franny, working with fragments of text drawn from *Franny and Zooey* (1961/1994).

I brought my proposition on Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* to the worksession with Gey Pin. I had chosen the following extract for my work:

"Only the words break the silence, all other sounds have ceased. If I were silent I'd hear nothing. But if I were silent the other sounds would start again, those to which the words have made me deaf, or which have really ceased. But I am silent, it sometimes happens, no, never, not one second. I weep too without interruption. It's an unbroken flow of words and tears. With no pause for reflection. But I speak softer, every year a little softer. Perhaps. Slower too, every year a little slower. Perhaps. It is hard for me to judge. If so the pauses would be longer, between the words, the sentences, the syllables, the tears, I confuse them, words and tears, my words are my tears, my eyes my mouth. And I should hear, at every little pause, if it's the silence I say when I say that only the words break it. But nothing of the kind, that's not how it is, it's forever the same murmur, flowing unbroken, like a single endless word and therefore meaningless, for it's the end that gives the meaning to words" (1999, p. 40).

From the beginning, this text fragment triggered the desire within me to explore the juxtaposition of young and old: I felt drawn to portray an old woman in need to rediscover her inner child, her innocent youthfulness.

As soon as I started working with the text at home, a memory resurfaced: I recalled the carefree play of a seven-year old me in an old slate mine in the mountainous region of Taunus near Frankfurt am Main in Germany. Whilst on holiday with my parents, I had slipped out of the garden of my granddad's holiday home and into the forest which lay behind it. I knew the forest well, we had come to stay and I had played here many times - and I knew of a number

of entrances to slate mines which lay hidden in the forest. One day, armed only with a self-made torch, a pen and paper, a warm coat and a sandwich I had set out to investigate and map the old mines. At the time I had been entirely oblivious to the dangers which such playful exploration might entail.

As I began working with the Beckett text, the silence and stillness of the mines returned to me. Whilst Beckett's words reflect a man aggrieved by a profound lack of inner silence, my childhood associations carried me back to place deep inside a mountain where profound silence was the primary condition. I had wondered hundreds of meters into one of abandoned mines, my torch flickered, I paused, the sound of my footsteps ceased, I held my breath ... and around me only silence, a still ... disturbingly undisturbed silence, pregnant with memories of the past.

Under Gey Pin's watchful eye I began to develop my score of actions rooted in the explorations of the mine, which was soon enriched by other experiences I had made later in life ... underground in the catacombs of Paris and in natural caves in Italy, Germany and the UK. I became an archaeologist, digging into the memories of my younger self, using them to sculpt a score of actions which could embody the Beckett text. Soon, I was playing with 'darkness and light', 'silence and sound', 'solitude and presence' and 'attraction and repulsion'. Over the days Gey Pin remodelled my costume, from outdoor clothing to plain clothes under a blanket which we found at the centre. My score of actions evolved. The gaps between my actions became smaller and my performance became increasingly nuanced, as I projected my associations into the space and let my body react to what was emerging in the collision of the physical space with the spaces of my memories. From this collision emerged an imaginal space in which new associations triggered more microscopic actions which gradually helped to bring the Beckett text to life.

Nonetheless I began to struggle with a growing chasm between my inner life and the original meaning of the text. Whilst my childhood associations were flowing, I felt I had lost the old woman whose voice also needed to be heard. I thought that my inner experience ought to relate to the meaning of the text - and the discrepancy created an increasing dissonance within me which I thought must be visible to the spectator, even though Gey Pin indicated nothing of the kind. She only seemed concerned with my ability to let the body speak and playfully express the piece, whilst adhering strictly to the tempo-rhythm of the text and my emerging score of actions. By day four my inner chasm had grown to such proportions that I decided to overhaul my score of actions. I let the mind take control and create a new score which felt more logical and more appropriate to the text. However, I had missed one important point: Gey Pin wanted me to persist in my search, stick to the existing structure and let my body discover the solution. Instead my mind took charge. Gey Pin reacted by leaving

the room, making no comment at all. Puzzled I returned to my original score. It was not until after my encounter with the Workcenter that the penny dropped and I understood her concerns.

More days passed. I continued to dig. Many diverse memories resurfaced - none of which seemed in relationship with the meaning of the text. Animals came to me ... first a spider in the cave, then a bird whose wings became the blanket, and also a monkey and a dog. I also worked with the memory of my young self sneaking into my parent's living room at night in an attempt to secretly watch a film with them ... from behind the couch. All those associations offered new ways of moving which I attempted to incorporate into my score, always digging deeper - or was I digging to the side? My score of actions no longer made sense to me and I lost faith in my acting proposition. As I struggled to make sense of the flood of associations whilst following my original score and sculpting it onto the text, I encountered question after question: Which association should I follow? Which discard? What about the old woman? Should I still endeavour to give her expression? How to balance the associations of the moment with the enduring precision of executing a fixed score? How much detail ought I fix? And in all this how ought I relate to the audience? Should I project onto them just as I am projecting onto the space? How much should I receive from them, react to them? And above all, does the juxtaposition of the young child with the Beckett text really work?

Ten days of work with a proposition are hardly enough time to answer those questions. I believe that Gey Pin's central motive was to help me discover an inner flow of associations originating not from the conscious mind, but from the body. As in the work with songs and physical exercises, she helped me explore how one might channel the never-ending stream of associations and impulses through a fixed score of actions. And as in the other components of the work, the key was to live the questions, to be receptive and to follow the stream of inner life instead of attempting to find answers. The work triggered a battle between my ego and my body. My ego wanted to remain in charge of the action. It knew better. It wanted to take control and sort out the problem. I had the tendency to try and resolve the mystery, rather than allowing myself to live it. It was this tendency, amongst others, which became my baggage in my encounter with the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards.

**\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.4 for full material\***

Reduced cluster depiction. For the full document please see Appendix K.5.

## *Dzieci*

### ***Theatre as Service***

The following cluster depiction features the work of theatre director Matt Mitler and his New York City based ensemble Dzieci. The depiction is based on my practical immersion in the work of Dzieci in January 2009 (see **Appendix J.1**), as well as on interviews I conducted with Matt in August 2007 and January 2009 (see **Appendix J.2**). The depiction also draws on other interviews Matt has given in recent years (see **Appendix J.9**) and on Matt's own writings about his philosophy and approach (see **Appendices J.10 - 12**). Lastly the depiction is enriched by interviews I conducted with Dzieci members in January 2009, as follows:

- ✓ Bob Strock, Music Director (see **Appendix J.3**)
- ✓ Stephen Shelley, past member of Dzieci (see **Appendix J.4**)
- ✓ Rebecca Sokoll, Assistant Director (see **Appendix J.5**)
- ✓ Yvonne Brechbühler, long-standing member of Dzieci (see **Appendix J.6**)
- ✓ Jesse Hathaway, long-standing member of Dzieci (see **Appendix J.7**)
- ✓ Dzieci Ensemble Dialogue (see **Appendix J.8**)

*Dzieci at work in Cabrini Center for Nursing & Rehabilitation, Lower East Side, Manhattan.*

Photos by Krystyna Sanderson. Sourced from: <http://dziecitheatre.org>

## Searching for the Sacred: Matt Mitler

Matt Mitler is the Artistic Director of the New York City based experimental theatre ensemble *Dzieci* (Polish for 'children') which he founded in 1997. Dedicated to a search for the 'sacred' through the medium of theatre, Dzieci represents a unique synthesis of Matt's personal work within, and his study of theatrical and spiritual disciplines - an exploration now spanning over three decades.

Matt Mitler.  
Photo by Tom Carrozza.

Matt initially trained in Humanistic and Existential Psychology before discovering the healing potential of theatre. He considers his therapeutic studies with R. D. Laing and Carl Rogers to be equal to his theatrical explorations with Jerzy Grotowski and The Polish Laboratory Theatre in the late 1970s. Combining these two pursuits, Matt travelled throughout Europe and the US for many years, leading workshops in creative self-expression and running theatrical projects and ritual experiments in a variety of settings, including Hutchings Psychiatric Center (NY), The National Theatre School of Sweden, and the graduate school of The University of Psychology of Warsaw. Today, Matt's main focus is on Dzieci which aims to create a theatre that is as equally engaged with personal transformation as it is with public presentation.

"Towards this aim, the ensemble balances its work on performance with work of service, through creative and therapeutic interaction in hospitals and a variety of institutional settings. Dzieci believes helping others generates a profound healing effect that not only serves the patient but also strengthens the ensemble's work.

Dzieci is firmly dedicated to process. Our theatrical creations come organically over a long period of time, and a relationship with the world around us is essential. Therefore, public demonstrations of the work in progress are offered along the way, along with para-theatrical workshops, which invite participants to experience the work underlying our most current investigations" (Dzieci, 2010).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

## Principles of Dzieci

### On theatre as service

“We’re using theatre as an act of service in the real Christian sense of the word. It also has a humbling effect on how we perform” (in Blaney, 2003, p. 136).

In his early years Matt was never comfortable with taking ownership of his visual artwork or his performance work; and he rejected compliments and applause. “...if someone said, ‘You were really great, that was really good,’ I would say, ‘Well, no, not really.’ I didn’t have it in me to say, ‘It’s God work.’ I wasn’t that kind of person. I didn’t have that sort of attitude or vocabulary. But there was some ... unworded awareness that it wasn’t mine” (Matt, my interview, lines 460 - 463). Expanding on his early sense that his work was originating from somewhere other than his ego, Matt refers to Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift*. “...he talks about the ancient Greeks and how someone with a talent made sacrifices to the gods because it wasn’t his. And how today the artist is the god. And the public sacrifices [...] I don’t have it in me to be the Hollywood Idol. I don’t ... it’s not something I want ... or need” (ibid, lines 471 - 474).

For Matt, acting came about as a form of therapy. “It was really something that my body and psyche needed. And then other stuff came into play and I was doing things that were not healthy - but I had this sense that things were not in balance. So, the idea of service was just a way of purifying the process and the experience” (ibid, lines 495 - 502). Throughout his career, Matt saw other performers lead a life of imbalance, a life exploited by art. Matt wanted a practice which would serve both his art and his life off-stage. “People were really not healthy, they were good in their performance but not healthy in their lives. I saw that with some of Grotowski’s company, too. This ... this ... this ... something on stage and something else in life. My thing was how to have a practice, an art that served life” (ibid, lines 506 - 509).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

Service has become a central building block in the work of Dzieci. The company often performs in hospitals and hospices. In Dzieci, work is created in service of life. To Matt, this means working on attenuating the ego and developing inner integrity.

“...if you have a performer bug, you are not performing. You’re doing three, four performances of *Fools Mass* in December and interactions in front of patients ... and you’re not on a stage, you’re by their bedside. If you have a performing urge, it’s not getting fed. So, I talk about the carrot on the stick in front of the donkey. When that carrot is taken away, what makes that donkey move? We’re all donkeys, whether it’s ego, money ... there is something that leads us - but often it’s not something that leads us from an inner integrity. So, the first thing is to

remove all that stuff. You starve it, suffocate it - and some people leave pretty quickly. But at a certain point the little thing, the very quiet voice that says, 'This is why I want this...' becomes a louder voice. And begins to have some authority. And once it has authority, you don't lose the other voices but they no longer are the active, driving force. Something else becomes an active force. Saying that Dzieci is an act of service doesn't mean that you WANT to help people ... and if you WANT to help people ... that's gonna get smashed too! It's not gonna last long" (ibid, lines 605 - 618).

The company periodically holds meetings during which personal issues are articulated and processed, and if a member of the group requires support from Dzieci, the group will come in service of the individual. - Nonetheless, most of the ensemble's process and support work unfolds through and informs the actual work, and this is primarily non-verbal. Dzieci's approach is not psychotherapeutic.

"We're not a talking group. We're also not saying, 'This is to work out your problems.' But we're also not denying problems. The aim is that whatever you have in the moment is what you work with. [...] You're not there to work on what you have ... you're there to take what you have and put it into the work. So, there is a different orientation. One is ... the arrow points to me. My needs, my wants, my imbalances. And the other is that those qualities and needs and wants are put towards a service. And that's the difference" (ibid, lines 1498 - 1501). During the actual work "anyone can leave the group to have a fit, to scream, to cry, but no one is allowed to go out to help them, comfort them. If they do that within the context of the work, then we work with it, but we still don't comfort them. It's all about ... whatever is really happening ... always putting it into the work, putting it into the work, into the work ... not that that's easy to do - people always resist it. But it's just about the work" (ibid, lines 629 - 634).

To Matt, service means sacrifice. Grotowski's inquiry "Why do we sacrifice?" lead Dzieci to ask "What do we sacrifice?" and "How do we sacrifice?"

"What I need to sacrifice is nothing less than myself. My likes and dislikes. My insecurities. My tensions. My habits. Everything in me that can be destroyed must be destroyed. What is called for, ultimately, is a human sacrifice. This is not a metaphysical activity Dzieci is concerned with. This is practical. We approach 'art as service' by initially working with disadvantaged populations in hospitals and other treatment centres. We do not take this work in order to heal (or even help) those in need. It's done to sacrifice our false selves" (Mittler, 2006, lines 49 - 56).

Matt feels that Dzieci has made a difference to the lives of its members.



"I think they have healthier, creative lives. They're not running off to do dinner theatre because they need to perform so badly that they take some horrible job like that. They're getting their PhDs in psychology, they're getting involved in art therapy, music therapy. They're doing work of substance, not work to feed an ego. That makes me really happy" (Matt, my interview, lines 556 - 560).

Matt has also noticed that the lives of Dzieci members seem more stable than that of the average actor. "...most of the Dziecis have a significant other, spouse, and kids, two kids even. They have families, jobs, a life of a certain balance. The gravity is there" (ibid, lines 568 - 570).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

### **On absence and presence**

Over the years Matt has learned to appreciate the difference between absence and presence in performance. He recalls his early performer self as almost entirely 'unconscious':

"I was good then in this almost completely unconscious way. Just leaping into the void and being wild ... and that made me a very dynamic actor and funny comedian ... but I can't say that I was really present. [...] I would do something and then ask afterwards, 'So, what did I do?' I was really in this almost trance state. And the work with ritual and my investigation of ritual was also about trance states" (ibid, lines 274 - 276).

It wasn't until his work with *No Net* that Matt really began to grasp the importance of being present during a performance. *No Net* were improvisational performances in which Matt created entire two-hour shows from scratch, asking his audience only for one or two locations and seven characters. "I'd write that down and then I'd improvise a two act play, alone. And in intermission I'd ask for more characters and locations, so I couldn't premeditate the second half" (ibid, lines 310 - 311). Matt recalls how his first *No Net* performances strongly depleted him. "I was ... a wreck beforehand, thinking, 'Why am I doing this, this is insane. I'm going to jump across the Grand Canyon on motorcycle.' And then afterwards I was depleted, empty, sick. Sometimes I was even sick beforehand" (ibid, lines 314 - 315). During those first *No Net* performances Matt describes that he was using himself as fuel.

"I was tapping into this place of just pure spontaneity and intuition. But leaving my body. My body would obey, leaping and jumping and changing characters and doing all kinds of things - and my body was trained, so I wasn't hurting myself - but in terms of energy I was ... there are two ways of performing: one is that you eat yourself up, you are the fuel. And there is a point where that just ends. You die and you see that with many artists. Performing artists, musicians. And there is another kind of eating besides eating oneself" (ibid, lines 384 - 390).

It was Matt's work within the Gurdjieffian tradition which fostered his inner awareness and which led him away from depletion and towards inner attention and rejuvenation. By the time he performed his last No Net he developed

"enough of a skill of play with inner awareness and attention [...] and I did the whole thing and I was aware of everything - and it wasn't any lesser of an event. And at the end I said, 'I'm going to stay present during the applause as well.' I've always been awkward with applause. And I just stood there, like I was drinking this applause, like a vessel that was being filled from the bottom up. [...] And I walked out with more energy and this sense of aliveness ... and I felt that finally now I had fused all these practices" (ibid, lines 317 - 326).

Ever since, Matt has made a rigorous effort to be present during his performance work. He describes this effort as deeply grounded in his diligent meditation practice. Before performance work Matt meditates, "sitting, containing myself" (ibid, lines 404 - 405), and during performance he attempts to connect to his "own physical sensations" (ibid, line 406) whenever possible. Matt asserts that his full body awareness is the result of years of awareness practice in which he learned to sense the energy flow within the whole of his body.

"...early on in my meditative practice I'd be able to feel my pulse and tingling in my hands, my feet, my face. And then from there maybe my chest. And then ... time passes, and I'm going on many retreats, and I was a diligent practitioner, [...] I was trying to be an adept. And I sacrificed a lot for that. There came a time a time when suddenly my whole body would have sensation. There'd be a flow of energy. Or if there wasn't a flow of energy I'd be aware of where there wasn't a flow of energy - and by my being aware energy would begin to move there. So, something began to change in terms of my inner mechanism. And that changed primarily from developing attention, developing awareness" (ibid, lines 407 - 420). "There is a materiality to being, there always is, and my attention to that specifically refines the materiality, expands it" (ibid, lines 1900 - 1901).

The development of inner awareness and presence has become another major building block in the work of Dzieci. "We don't do theatre to become good actors or because we want to be on stage, we do theatre because we find it the most efficacious way of developing attention. The effort of being present in theatre is in a way more demanding than being present in life but more possible because it's an artificial situation, under artificial conditions" (ibid, lines 423 - 426).

## On the value of an audience

Matt proposes that in the work with presence an audience raises the stakes.

“I can be very present in the chapel, the Zen temple, in the quiet place - but [...] [W]hen an audience is watching me ... if I have certain habitual patterns one of which is an ego that wants to be liked or be applauded or make people laugh or cry - it's going to leap forward unless it's been tamed. So the audience is the catalyst, the heat, the fire of the Bunsen burner under the test tube. You've been mixing your chemicals and now you build the fire - the audience does that. We're not there for the audience, the audience is there for our combustion, and it is that combustion which can serve the audience” (ibid, lines 430 - 437).

Matt describes that Dzieci's performance work often unfolds under particularly intense gaze, for Dzieci often performs in sacred spaces in the presence of clergy.

“...we go to ... the Abbey of Regina Laudis, and perform [...] for 50 nuns, the oldest of whom is 98 and has lived through two world wars, that's quite an intense fire. They're sitting there, they're present and attentive before we walk in. They're not talking and looking at their programmes. They're in a state of prayer. So, with that... what that strips out of us is pretty amazing. And in a certain respect there is some similarity to working with patients. If we are working at the bedside of someone who is dying, they don't have any mask. So, if I have a mask I am grotesquely aware of that. So, part of this is ... the audience feeds the awareness. And then the interesting thing that happens is that our process then has a direct effect on the audience - BUT our aim is not to affect the audience. In effect, that would be an ego manifestation. My God, I'm going to change the audience's psychological state, spiritual state - how presumptuous” (ibid, lines 437 - 448).

Under the right circumstances, Dzieci's presence with an audience can lead to an initiatic experience, both within the actors and the audience. Eye contact is central in this initiation. It increases a performer's presence and vulnerability - masks drop away and true communion is possible. Such communion, however, can only unfold with certain audiences: In mainstream performance, Matt asserts, audiences are interested in a change of *state*, not a change of *being*.

“...commerce is based upon change of state. *Cries and Whispers* is not going to make the money that *Armageddon* is making. The therapies and religions that offer a two-day workshop where you walk out feeling high as a kite - and who cares if you go back and beat your dog - they're going to make more money than the ones that have the demand that you change your life because that's a really gruelling process. And the actor who wants to go through that process is not the actor who wants to be a star in Hollywood” (ibid, lines 437 - 448).

## On working with inner and outer orientation

As in Gurdjieff work, Dzieci's preperformative work is punctuated by time dedicated to stillness.

"Antero calls it ... No-Form? We call it stillness. Or we say, let's make a circle and we stand in stillness. So, it's always back to *inner orientation*. But the idea is not to be absorbed with my inner orientation. It's to be aware of ... to have the attention strong enough that I can be completely attentive to my inner process AND aware of my outer process and aware of it in such a way that I am receiving the process" (ibid, lines 654 - 658).

Matt refers back to his No Net performances. In the beginning, he suggests, he was sacrificing himself in unconstructive ways, he was losing himself, draining himself. He was not present and he was not receiving the audience. Matt emphasises that *receiving* the audience is not the same as *reacting* to its presence and energy. Reception requires consciousness, whereas reaction can be instinctual and thus unconscious. In Dzieci, the performers spend much time on practicing simultaneous awareness of inner processes and outer perceptions.

"We sit, in Zen, sitting in a circle. And then we begin to put words to our inner process, like 'I'm sensing a tension in my back.' Whatever. [...] we open our eyes, unfocused. And now, what's my awareness this moment? I'm aware of my body being this, this, this ... And then we raise our eyes to someone across from us. Still describing our inner process. So, now I'm looking at this person, I'm seeing that there is an impulse to smile - but I'm not smiling, I just see the impulse to smile. And then I look at the person really close to me, still making an effort with this process, working on presence, attention, and this description of the inner process - but with eye contact. Receiving the person and it's hard, hard work" (ibid, lines 935 - 944).

Company debriefings, too, are carried out with inner awareness.

"We'll have a discussion, someone has a problem [...] And in the middle I'll say, 'What do you sense inside yourself right now?' - 'What do you mean?' - 'What's your body doing?' - 'Well, my legs are crossed over, my right hand is in my left hand, I am aware of a certain tension in the right part of my neck, and this that... and the images are flowing...' I demand that people be responsible for their experience, be present to it" (ibid, lines 666 - 669).

## On silence

At the beginning of their work, the Dzieci sit in silence, “as a way of searching inwardly and paying attention to where we are as a group,” Mitler says. “We want to leave the past behind and the future alone and come in fairly much with a clean slate” (Blaney, 2003, p. 148).

Journalist Retta Blaney who has written about Dzieci in her book *Working On The Inside: The Spiritual Life Through The Eyes Of Actors* participated in ‘Vow of Silence’ - a four-hour workshop by the group. She recalls the experience of working in silence as follows:

“Dzieci members met their guests outside the room to inform them that the silence could not be broken. If they needed to talk to a member of the company, they should motion for the person to come outside. Mitler [...] was the director, moving the afternoon from one experience to another with subtle gestures. [...] the workshop participants seemed at ease with both the silence and the waiting, gathering in a circle at first just to stand still, with the only sound that of the whirring of the heating system. After several minutes, Mitler took a few steps to the side; others did the same. This was followed by head rolling, then winging of arms until the movements began to flow in a circle. The silence was broken only by the sound of knees cracking and heavy breathing as the pace quickened. The movements began to resemble a choreographed dance. With the group thus unified, Mitler knelt on the floor, signalling the start of trust exercises in which the ensemble members and eventually guests climbed on one another’s shoulders and were lifted to touch the ceiling, before falling backwards into arms of the waiting group” (Blaney, 2003, p. 65).

Blaney reports that inner silence is also a key ingredient to Dzieci’s work in hospital settings.

“Drawing on inner silence helps him [Matt, JB] deal with any patient, even those who may appear unpleasant. ‘If I approach them intellectually, it distances me. If it is with my whole person, I find compassion and I am able to do something but it doesn’t come from me. I’m as touched as they are’” (ibid, p. 64).

At the end of their work, Dzieci gather again in silence.

“‘We want to feel the vibration of what we’ve just done and measure our state of energy from what it was before to what it is now; to see if it’s moved in an evolutionary manner, if the energy is finer or coarser. And to check our movement on the path.’ Mitler says this ritual is important to his own self-study. ‘I feel the energy in my chest and heart, an openness. That’s my litmus test. We do it for self-change. If I have a transformational experience of some sort, then the audience can have a similar experience. If I’m false, it’s manipulative. It always comes down to us working on ourselves.’” (ibid, p. 148).

Dzieci eschews applause. Dzieci's ritual work demands energy containment - and applause disperses energy.

"There is a whole thing about containing energy. Again, this comes from Gurdjieff work. I used to get a lot of energy and I'd spill the energy. I would get so high from workshops and then I would be gone. So, it's about accumulating ... you have to work on the vessel because there are always cracks, but then it's accumulating ... because it can go like that (*Matt makes the sound of a lightning bolt*) and you're left with an actual negative resource. You've spilt more than you have accumulated. And you end up with less than you had. But if you slow down the process, if it takes a day, if it comes out more slowly, something remains. That's what begins to create change of being. If that energy is allowed to remain a little bit longer" (Matt, my interview, lines 1004 - 1006).

### **On working with ritual**

Throughout their work, Dzieci engage with an intention to make sacred their actions. Matt affirms that Dzieci is a theatre company which practices active rituals.

"We 'ritualize' every performance we do. Our work in hospitals, in rehearsals, and in the workshops we lead, all follow ritual forms. [...] This is not saying that we set a form in stone and then follow it slavishly. We return to the form always as if it is for the first time, and the form is forever changing. This is a 'living' ritual, as opposed to a 'dead' ritual. So, it's not that ritual is important in our work, it IS our work" (Mittler, 2008, lines 83 - 89).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

Reflecting on the validity of Dzieci's pick-and-mix approach to the world's wisdom traditions, Matt agrees that "the servant cannot be a servant of two masters. So, there is something about staying with a practice" (Matt, my interview, lines 1455 - 1456). However, mirroring Gurdjieff's eclectic approach Matt asserts that "There is also the sense that there is a lineage which is beyond the typical labels today [...] there is a teaching that is beneath and above all of them and any real master, any spiritual lineage I have ever met with speaks of all practices. And Grotowski was interested in what's the commonality" (ibid, lines 1505 - 1507). Dzieci digs into the bedrock of ritual. As were Grotowski and Gurdjieff, Matt is interested in Objective Art and Ritual. Within Dzieci he continues to research the fundamental elements of effective ritual. Reflecting on the efficacy of Dzieci's practice, Matt proposes that

"the most important thing is not sticking to one practice, as much as it is working with a group. It's the work on oneself with others. So that you see real strides being made. For instance, the 12-step group which is not aligned to any particular

religion. It's a practice, I mean, it's Christian based but it's not denominational. So, it's the working with others that makes the difference. [...] even the greatest scientists are working in a community. It's the working together. There is always the mountain climbing analogy. So, I'm really suspect of anyone trying to do anything on their own. I mean, I am not going to deny their experience - who am I to say. But I know for myself that I need to work with other people" (ibid, lines 1467 - 1476).

Apart from the communal aspect of the work, Matt again highlights the importance of presence in action.

"For me the real effort is to create work that can demand a level of presence from moment to moment to moment ... that precludes this attraction to go into my head and into the past or into the future. [...] It's 'Are you present now?' - 'Now, are you present?' - 'Now?' - 'Now?' - And if you're not, there is real suffering, so something is really required ... and continuously. We've always said that if we're trying to create transformation, the only barometer is ... 'Are we being transformed?' And we circle before *Fools Mass* [one of Dzieci's signature performance pieces, JB] and we circle after *Fools Mass* and there is always a different quality of energy following the Mass. That's the proof that something is happening" (ibid, lines 1355 - 1368).

Qualifying the perceived change in energy, Matt elucidates that Dzieci strive for a state of heightened energy and awareness. "I'm looking for the higher. I want to put myself under the higher. I want my work and my community that is Dzieci to be part of a larger body that is committed to higher work" (ibid, lines 1436 - 1437). In search for the higher Dzieci has found a true home in the Benedictine Abbey of Regina Laudis.

"When I was at the abbey [...] the first time I picked up the rules of St. Benedict. And I was astonished: There are so many rules that we have adopted in Dzieci, verbally or non-verbally, which are the same. It seems totally natural [...] And Mother Prioress just looked at me and said, 'You're Benedictine!'" (ibid, lines 1815 - 1819).

Matt also describes Dzieci as having some alignment with esoteric Christianity, expressing particular interest in the New Testament apocrypha. He refers to the Gospel of Thomas which asserts the idea that "action without presence or prayer can only lead to a descending movement. The idea is that the two are together: contemplation and action" (ibid, lines 1212 - 1213).

*"Jesus said, 'If they say to you, 'Where did you come from?' say to them, 'We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established [itself] and became manifest through their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?', say, 'We are its children, we are the elect of the Living Father.' If*

*they ask you, 'What is the sign of your father in you?', say to them, 'It is movement and repose'" (Thomas, 50).*

"It's not movement OR repose, it's movement AND repose - so, how can I be in action with this inner attentiveness, this contemplative effort?" (Matt, my interview, lines 1217 - 1218). Nonetheless, whilst Dzieci is officially incorporated as a church with Matt as its certified chaplain, it does not solely seek out engagement with the 'higher', transcendental dimensions of the human soul - it also engages vigorously with the lower, gritty world of human existence.

*"...we have done services for Ascension and for someone who is dead, and next thing we're in a nightclub, performing a striptease Burlesque piece as Eastern European idiots. This thing of moving backwards and forwards between different worlds, so that we're not just these holy relics and we're also not just these goofy clowns. But we keep shifting backwards and forwards between these worlds, because each world informs the other and together they make a complete world. And a complete exploration of the self" (ibid, lines 1196 - 1202).*

### **Beyond the limit**

Dzieci's rituals push boundaries. The company members are challenged to encounter their limits and move beyond them.

*"...the thing with Grotowski's work, and I've taken some of his work plus the encounter group work and added my own inventions based upon rituals, was to be pushed to your barriers. To your limits and inevitably, for me, my perception of it ... when one encounters the limit ... it moves. It's not there anymore. You think you'll hit it and ... then that wall is gone - but you don't want to get close to it. You don't want to go near it. And once we see that ... this person is afraid of being touched, this person has this fear of whatever ... we'll push it, we'll go for it. It all gets touched and moved in the work" (ibid, lines 646 - 653).*

Reflecting on the value of being pushed to one's limit, Matt recalls a workshop which he once held in Europe.

*"...we did a 48 hour [workshop] ... which I thought was phenomenal. At the end of the 48th hour, the group was all collapsed and they were in a pile of twisted bodies. Sweaty bodies lying on the floor, and one person raised a hand ... and someone else blew on the hand. And an improvisation started - and I [...] was a witness, I wasn't part of this. So, I just watched this evolving, incredible improv that was so pure and everyone was so connected, it was just, I wept, it made me cry. And that showed me the possibility of what a real group could do. There was an organic truth, and then I knew that training in certain principles would lead to something real" (ibid, lines 697 - 705).*



## **On self-indulgence**

Matt perceives a lot of performance work as having self-indulgent tendencies. Countless actors perform to gratify their egos. Matt asserts that in Dzieci self-indulgence is quickly spotted and confronted.

“It’s not, ‘How do I keep from being self-indulgent?’ It’s ‘How do I see my self-indulgence?’ And then, ‘How do I see it ... to a point where it has such presence that I suffer it - cause, why would I not be self-indulgent?’ We’ve got to see what’s our own particular brand of self-indulgence. And much better than me saying, ‘You’re being self-indulgent’ is to keep trying to hone the exercise - so they go, ‘Oh! I’m seeing something of myself.’ It might be years” (ibid, lines 902 - 907).

Matt proposes that work with closed eyes can foster self-indulgence, for it helps people withdraw from the outer world. When working with Grotowski, Matt noticed how much importance was placed on eye contact in the work sessions.

“...there was a lot of play with eye contact. And then it’d be lights off and you’d be jumping around, flying - but you wouldn’t hit each other. My thing is, get to the point where the sensitivity and awareness is just so there! But if you go the other way, there is no coming back. There is no coming back from that place” (ibid, lines 971 - 979).

In Dzieci, the performers work with eye-contact long before Matt allows them to act in darkness or with their backs turned to one another. Sensitivity and awareness are central. Outer orientation is as important as inner connection.

The regular periods of stillness, in sitting or standing Zen, help the Dzieci keep self-indulgence in check.

“And you can react to it, thinking, ‘Shit, I was just doing this thing and I didn’t want to stop it...’ or just stop and see where you were. Where are you? Where is your centre of gravity? The centre of gravity of indulgence is a little higher than the centre of gravity of service, that’s in the heart for one thing. And if it’s balanced service then it’s in the hara” (ibid, lines 885 - 889).

In the end Matt asserts

“there is a point where the impulse of indulgence comes up, but I don’t follow it. And then after a while it’s just, it’s not there. But there is something new that comes and takes its place. Something deeper to work on” (ibid, lines 918 - 920).

### **On being a buffoon**

Dzieci aligns itself with the art of the Buffoon, the wise fool, the trickster who “doesn't fit in, who may be marginalized, often physically or mentally impaired, but innocent in relation to the rest of the world. This character turns everything upside down. Preferably in a humorous way, but not without pathos” (2008, lines 14 - 16). Matt asserts that the Buffoon carries him/herself with great “humility” (ibid, line 28). The Buffoon is not merely a clown. Instead s/he acts with a “very passive presence” (ibid, line 54). Matt believes that this passive presence or “stillness, that listening, is invaluable in acting any role in any medium” (ibid, lines 54 - 55).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

Dzieci also use their Buffoon practice in workshops with clergy, helping them to be more authentic and spontaneous in their practices. Furthermore, in clinical settings, the wisdom of the fool very much comes to the fore.

“The actors’ approach is to always appear less advantaged than the patients, coming in with tattered costumes and comic, misshapen teeth. ‘If they’re fearful, we’re more fearful,’ Mitler says. From there the actors work to build the trust of their patients, who frequently are children with psychiatric problems. ‘We act like we don’t know what to do, and then we try to do something and we can’t do it’” (Blaney, 2003, p. 136).

The Buffoons’ innocence and humility gradually wins them the trust of the children who

“fall off a table into their arms, then the children fall into each other’s arms and finally the staff people fall into the children’s arms. That final role reversal of the staff person trusting the children empowers the children with the pride of having caught him. ‘That trust goes on after the performance,’ Mitler says. ‘We leave and something changes. They see the therapist or staff person differently, and the staff person sees the patient differently’” (ibid).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

Reflecting on the effect of Dzieci's interventions Matt suggests

"...what we do is: come into the situation at a (seemingly) lower level than the patients. They then reach out to help us and lift us up to their level. In alchemy this follows the dictum: The lower meets the higher, becomes the middle. We find this in metaphysics, physics, and all esoteric teachings. So, the lower (Dzieci) meets the higher (patients) and becomes the middle (improvisational event). Except that Dzieci only *appears* to be the lower, dressed as fools and acting scared. In reality we are the higher, and as the patients reach down to help us up they are actually reaching up and ascending. We are reaching down but are being passive. They are active and moving up. This then creates a path that is evolutionary" (Mitler, 2000).

By helping others, Matt also asserts, a profound healing effect is generated which not only serves the patient but also strengthens the ensemble's work. "The hymns we sing in our performances are sung at the bedsides of people who may be in pain or dying. The songs become 'coated' by these experiences and our relationship to them is forever altered" (Mitler, 2003, lines 66 - 69).

### **On training the body**

Dzieci does not operate full-time. The company members meet and train whenever they can - their meetings/ rehearsals are usually held twice a week. Whenever time allows the ensemble pursues intense physical work which develops relaxation and trust, as well as enhancing spontaneity and inner awareness. Matt asserts, "The body must be able to serve the moment of inspiration, and yet be able to be completely relaxed. Acrobatic skills, yoga, dance, all are helpful. There is a point in physical training where the work enters into the body and becomes invisible. Seeing the effort is so unappealing" (Mitler, 2008, lines 43 - 46). Often, the more advanced members of the company teach the less experienced members. Matt believes, that such teaching follows a ladder principle: "In order to ascend the ladder I have to help someone on the level below me. So, there is a structure of ascension" (Matt, my interview, lines 1060 - 1062).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

From the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2009 I participated in a 24-hour Paratheatre Marathon with Dzieci. My full experience of Dzieci during this visit which lasted ten days is depicted in my Dzieci Diary (**APPENDIX J.1**). Here I shall feature a longer extract to depict some of Dzieci's work with voice and body as I encountered it during the marathon.

"Following Bob, I begin to move through the space, connecting with others, making eye contact and attempting to move in unison. Bob and Megan share with me a movement which I believe I am to copy. It seems simple at first - a greeting, a bow, just a way to say 'hello' ... but I soon see more of the complexity of the movement which I sense ought to be followed precisely. One hand on the heart, let's say the right, the left raised above the head, palm facing outward ... as if shielding the eyes from the sun? A step back with the right foot, a sort of bow, looking downward, a pause. Then two steps forward with the right leg whilst the left hand travels to the heart, swaps place with the right. The right hand now rises above the head whilst I step back with my left foot, a bow, a pause. The right hand returns to the heart whilst the left foot takes two steps forward. --- So the movement continues, and continues, and continues ... alternating ... meeting the others ... seeing all ... moving with them for some time. [...]

Eventually the energy picks up, we are moving faster as a group, swarming amongst each other. I try to see the group as a whole whilst remaining aware of the individuals and myself. I try to follow the currents of the swarm. I love swarming! A circle forms and people begin to dance in its centre ... on their own, then in twos. [...]

We stand in silence. A circle of bodies, faces, eyes, alive from hours of movement.

Bob shares with us the first part of *Lume*. I listen intently, try to capture every nuance, articulation, inflection, pitch, melody, I try to catch the quality of the song, its earthy presence.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

We sing *Lume* ... I try to let it sink into the body, I try to be with the song - but it is so difficult to hear. So many voices, so many subtle deviations from the melody, creating so much white noise! Why are we singing? What is the purpose of *Lume*? What can it give to the group? What can we give? [...]

The group begins to move. Swarm once more through the space. Singing. Always singing. Bodies are now falling into outstretched arms, forwards, sideways, backwards. Matt offers me his hands - I climb into his palm even before other palms are in place. So eager, eh? I climb higher, soon stand on shoulders, looking down into the crowd. Matt signals for me to drop backwards. A sudden rush of excitement, a moment of arrest, breath held, hands raised to cover my face - no ... YES! Sure! Hurray! I let go, breathe, and drop backwards, no idea who is in place to catch me. I have in recent years found that I trust others more than I trust myself. - Really?? Come on Jessica! It's all part of your drama!! - Anyway, I let go with ease. Dropping backwards is fun!

One by one the others are lifted, climb onto shoulders, drop backwards into outstretched arms. I let one woman climb onto my shoulders, two helping hands immediately hold my waist, stabilise my core as the woman's body weighs heavily on me. The next moment she has fallen, the group rocks her like a baby, then

lowers her feet to the ground, then tosses her backward, forward, sideways before coming to momentary stillness. She stands, receives the group, still singing, she beams, radiates delight, merges with the group. Another takes her place. I see some Dzieci members hold one of the older women, comforting her, she looks thunderstruck. She doesn't want to face the climb? The fall?

I am in the centre again. One of the other workshop participants has pulled me out of the crowd. I would love to climb and fall again - but I know whose turn it is. I move towards the older woman, I smile, "No, no..." she whispers, I kneel before her. Her hesitant, unsteady feet climb upon my back. She sways, moves along. The group taker her higher. Singing, always singing. She cries. "No, I can't..." She falls and is caught, so many arms and hands holding her firmly, lowering her to the ground, gently. I am moved by her journey. We all need to practice letting go.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

Throughout we're still singing. Always singing. We end up each on our own, spending a few moments on the mat, singing to the group, alone. For the first time individual voices can be heard. There are some lovely sounds in the group! But retention of the song is poor, many people distort the words and melody. The song is passed to me ... I pick it up ... I'm shaking. My heart is beating fast, I feel a sudden rush of energy from my chest through my arms into my hands [...] My hands are on fire! I breathe, try to release my fearful grip, I try to allow the song to take flight - am I again trying too hard? Something loosens up. I see Jesse seeing me ... I am for a moment only aware of the song's echo in his eyes. I want to remain there - but I am compelled to turn, make contact with the rest of the group - which is what I ought to do? ... I move too quickly, my eyes begin to dart across the space, they stray for a split second in Matt's direction, then drift back without having made contact; and, as if with a mind of their own they come back into focus on one of the other participants - a hesitant connection. Awkward. Moments later I have passed on the song, I see others take the space and take their time and play! - I judge myself once more. 'There was a possibility for something. I killed it. Why didn't I take the time I needed? Why was I afraid to let the song speak through me?' - And why am I always so hard on myself? Why is nothing ever good enough?

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

We flow into stretches, gymnastic and acrobatic exercises. I feel utterly at ease here. I'm keen to try different lifts, stretches and backward bends. I love challenging myself through such exercises. I attempt to lift several people onto my thighs whilst standing, we wobble about, eventually we manage. I want to try again! Keep trying. The mats are once more rearranged ... back into a corridor. It's time for ... forward rolls! Oh yes! Someone takes position half way along the mat: offering a body bridge, across which we need to leap and land in a forward roll. I can't wait ... and eagerly line up. People are flying across the bridge with ease. It's Rebecca's turn. Her rather more timid and cautious forward roll

completely surprises me. And then it's my turn ... and Jesse is there. He stands in front of me with a big grin. 'You can do this one!' I hear him say in my mind ... Yeah sure. I know this one. A tiger leap. He'll stand there and he'll drop to the floor as soon as I approach and leap into the forward roll. Easy! I run, jump ... and crash into Jesse with an almighty bump. I hear roaring laughter in the group. I'm grinning, in a stunned sort of way - I haven't hurt myself and Jesse seems OK - but I'm confused. He didn't do what I expected him to! Insecurity surges up inside. Damn it. I so love doing this - just let me have another go and roll over a normal bridge! But Matt is already on the mat in a headstand legs split. Could I leap through his legs? Yes, probably - but my confidence is knocked. I don't want to hurt him or myself. I hesitate, I can't bring myself to try. Several other Dzieci members have a go. Megan throws herself in a courageous leap and earns the applause of the group. I signal that I want to try a lower hurdle first! Two guys line up in bridges, one behind the next. I finally have another go. This time I land badly. I have spent so much time in Aikido, unlearning the forward roll in favour of a roll over the left or right shoulder that I mess up my first attempt at a straight roll. Great! But what does it matter? I'm frustrated. It matters to me. So, more relentless self-judgement then, eh? We move on ... in my eyes too quickly. I wasn't done! I wanted more! I hadn't overcome my inhibition, my frustration.

We play with another trust exercise: One by one people run and leap forward into a corridor of arms. Lovely. No problem. Any time. Certainly easier than tiger leaps! I realise that some of the group had not participated in the forward rolls - this seems more appropriate for them. Is this why Rebecca had done such a careful forward roll? To encourage those less confident? Well, now everybody has a go, the groups seems in high spirit, energised.

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

It is now late at night. We have been working continuously for over 16 hours, I'm tired yet also energised, more quiet inside yet still commenting, laughing at myself, and yet crying. Having let go, a part of me still ponders what it means to let go. Crazy...

We begin what feels like a walking meditation, walking very slowly, lining up behind Matt, rotating inward in an ever narrower circle. I feel the shift of my weight from one leg to the next as I follow Matt's step with as much precision as I can muster. I look straight ahead, I try to see him as a whole, not only his feet or legs, moving. I try to see beyond his movements, too, sensing the rhythm of the group as a whole. Just as I wonder where the ever narrower circle might end up, Matt reverses back out, the tight spiral unravels, breaks up. We come to another pause. It is time for our midnight snack.

Jesse has withdrawn from the group and set up his painting equipment. We eat, I allow myself to lie down for the first time - but not to sleep. I have promised myself to stay awake all the way through the marathon. I won't break that promise. Jesse pulls me away from the group - and involves me in an elaborate painting ritual, the details of which I do not fully recall. [...]

The ritual becomes the initiatory gateway for a four (or five?) hour long drumming circle. The Dziecis have set up four chairs in a square in the centre of the room. At the heart of the square they place several candles. Now four people take the seat and hold a shamanic drum between them. The drumming begins. Slowly at first ... yet intensity ever increasing. Other people begin to move around the drummers in a circle, each finding ever new ways of relating to the drum through movement and sound. More instruments - drums, rattles, a gong, cow bells? - join the steadily swelling river of movement and drumming until it opens up into an endless ocean of ecstatic waves, contractions and expansions of a rapidly moving pulse. I remember little of these five hours. I remember timeless circles around ever changing centre. I remember oscillating between the centre, being at the heart of the pulse and returning to its circumference, dancing through a sea of resting bodies, dancing on the trail of others in front, dancing for the drum, dancing for the circle of dancers. I remember whirling for some time and discovering a beautiful stillness at the heart of my turning self. No thoughts penetrate here. Such is the stillness that I am able to whirl and see the space around, as if through glass washed by a rain shower which has now ceased and turned the outside landscape into a radial blur, with many details nonetheless. From this stillness emerges a path around the drum. So I circle, whirling, fully present, fully absent, no thought clouding my sight. No thought. No thought. With every turn the world comes more into focus. My commentary has ceased. Blissful stillness at the heart of the pulse.

My whirling ends, a sudden end caused by the emergence of a question: "Am I still in relationship?"

I bow to the ground, I touch the earth. Someone rushes to my side, I feel no sickness, no dizziness. I am back, now feeling empty and yet alive, tired and yet stirred, wary and yet delighted, once more commenting and nonetheless content. Such is the paradox that is Jessica. I am who I am despite of myself. I am becoming more of me ... when I relinquish my self. In my surrender lies my creation.

The morning has come. Matt and Megan open the curtains, revealing a window to the outside world. The view is surreal. From the 10<sup>th</sup> story of a Manhattan skyscraper one still sees only the gray walls of the building opposite. Glimpses of sky high above through glass clouded by city dirt. Megan recites a text ... its beautiful, clear words wash over me like dew. What was said, I don't recall. I remember feeling stirred and yet at peace. Now silence" (Jessica, Dzieci Diary, lines 287 - 555).

\*material omitted - please refer to cluster depiction in Appendix K.5 for full material\*

# Chapter 5:

## Composite Depiction

Following on from the individual depictions, the next step in the qualitative data analysis of a heuristic inquiry is the construction of a Composite Depiction which brings together the common qualities of the phenomenon investigated. As such, the Composite Depiction "includes all of the core meanings of the phenomenon as experienced by the individual participants and by the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52).

My immersive engagement with the individual depictions yielded a complex array of interrelated themes and subthemes. The essence of my Composite Depiction is captured in a map featured on the following page. The map structure conveys the integration of factors which, through my immersion in the range of activities and interviews, I have identified as being seminal to the profound transformational dynamics I witnessed. The body of this chapter is devoted to further substantiation of the themes and subthemes portrayed in the map, whilst the map itself brings everything into an integrated whole.

During the composite depiction I made extensive use of bookmarks which refer to the relevant text sections in the cluster depictions (as featured in Chapter 4 and **Appendices K.1 - K.5**). I have enclosed a copy of my thesis on the Appendices CD (**Appendix A**), allowing the reader to click onto the bookmarks and jump straight to the relevant text sections inside the main text. Please note that quotes which refer to the appendices have no such functionality.



# Composite Depiction

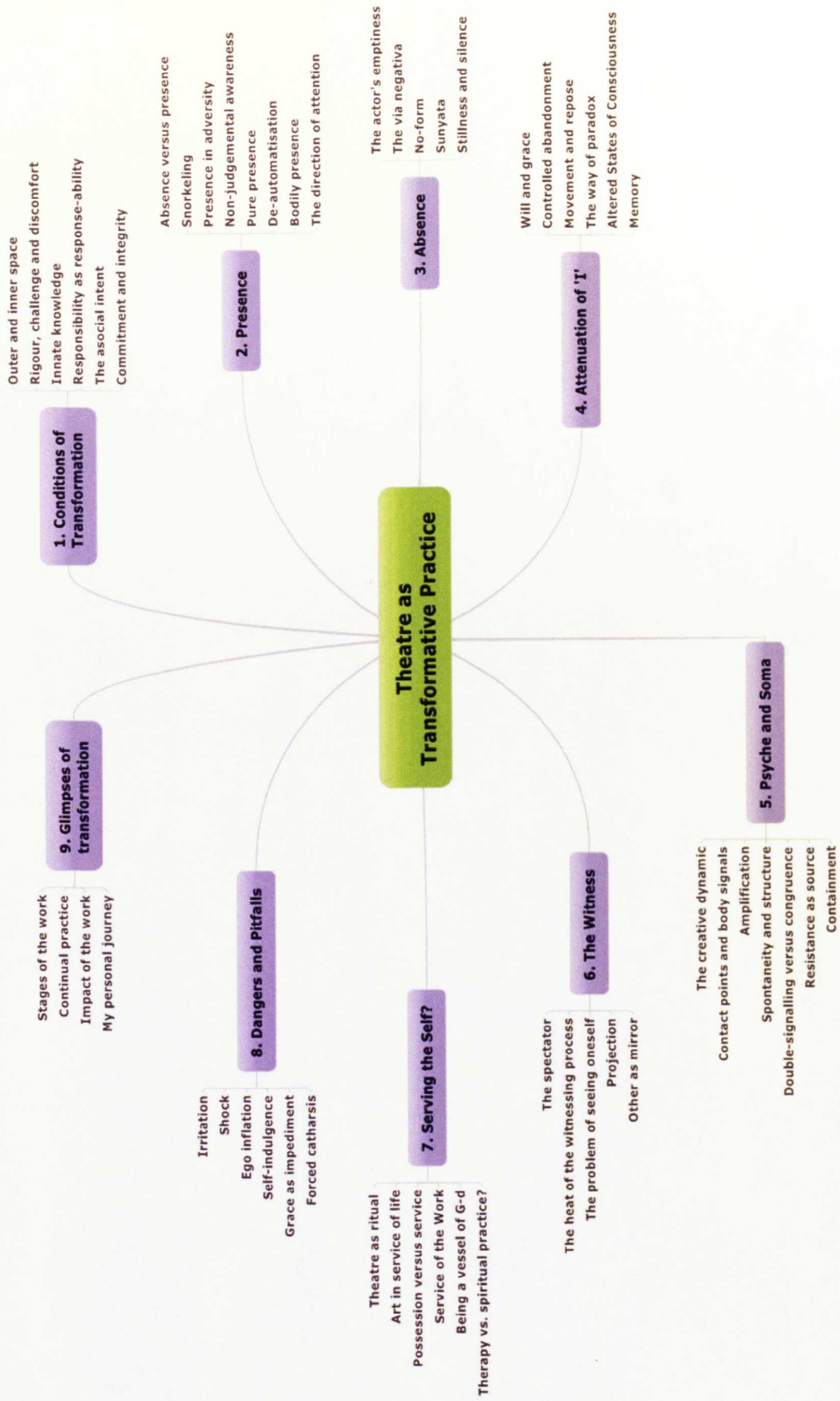


Figure 5.1: Composite Depiction - Map of Theatre as a Transformative Practice.

## **1. Conditions of Transformation**

My co-researchers highlight a number of fundamental external and internal conditions for the work of the actor on the self, as follows:

### **On outer and inner space**

Theatre as a Transformative Practice begins with the preparation of the work space which is kept clean and clear of unnecessary clutter. Clear boundaries are demarcated between the daily and the work areas which are kept free of personal belongings and clothing. Careful consideration goes into the arrangement of props and spatial configurations (e.g. the layout of chairs) which support the work.

Within ParaTheatrical ReSearch a special emphasis is placed on the sanctification of the work space. As part of the ritual work, participants claim the space, making it their own whilst beginning to surrender to their internal processes (see page 131). This sanctification of the space highlights the connection between the outer and inner dimensions of the actor's work. The outer space becomes the container for the inner material. Psychic events are projected onto the canvas of the outer space, and the preparation of the space aids the unfolding of memories and imagination. As the work progresses, it is fuelled by the continuous collision of inner and outer, of physical and imaginal space. I highlighted this in my depiction of Gey Pin's approach (see page 201).

### **On rigour, challenge and discomfort**

My co-researchers propose that psychologically and physically challenging conditions are advantageous for Theatre as a Transformative Practice, for they push boundaries, put participants outside of their comfort zone and encourage them to move beyond self-imposed limits. The work of Odin, Ang Gey Pin and the Workcenter are marked by a particularly high level of physical rigour and discipline. Training schedules often commence early in the morning and run until late at night. Strict rules apply to the practitioner's conduct in the work space and to the execution of the work (e.g. see page 191). The feedback of the director/facilitator is uncompromising and often relentless.

*From Mario Biagini at the Workcenter I had received the understanding that authentic performance required the most intense and dedicated training, that true mastery could only be achieved if one works relentlessly, day in, day out, ten*

*hours at a time, few breaks, sweat dripping from almost naked bodies in black bathing suits, songs sang for several hours, always in search of deeper connection, always in search of a deeper vitality (Jessica, see page 184).*

Members of Dzieci, the work of which is strongly aligned with Gurdjieff's approach, most overtly articulate the advantage of exposure to a severe environment in which practitioners are pushed to their limits.

*And the working with others under kind of difficult conditions creates this possibility for something more alive to emerge. (Stephen Shelley, see Appendix K.5, p. 45)*

*...when one encounters the limit ... it moves. It's not there anymore. You think you'll hit it and ... then that wall is gone - but you don't want to get close to it. You don't want to go near it. And once we see that ... this person is afraid of being touched, this person has this fear of whatever ...we'll push it, we'll go for it (Matt Mitler, see page 214).*

TAI also proposes that discomfort is part and parcel of self-exploration, however the company does not challenge its clients with the same severity as the other co-researchers do. TAI proposes that beyond the initial level of discomfort lies a deeper level of self-discovery and self-empowerment. Once they have pushed through discomfort, clients begin to see not what their limitations are ... but what they can do, indeed, what they have the power to achieve - and this insight often comes as an inspiring and uplifting surprise.

Within TAI, and also in the work of Arlene Audergon, the nature of self-challenge is of a different kind. Clients are not asked to immerse themselves in a 24-hour theatre marathon like the members of Dzieci. They are not pushed to spend long hours in physical training, as the Workcenter or Ang Gey Pin or Odin Teatret might demand. This does not mean that TAI's or Arlene's approach is less rigorous. Instead, the level of self-challenge is tailored to the constitution and purpose of the individual. TAI's corporate clients do not require the same physical fitness and control over their bodies as a professional performer does. In the Creative Dynamic Elise and Sam focus on what is working, what is flowing, enabling each person to engage with the physical components of the training in a way that makes them feel at ease.

The approach of TAI differs from the others in another crucial element: Whilst taking clients into the zone of discomfort, TAI fundamentally take an asset based approach with each client, that is they focus on what works, what flows, and not what blocks the person.

*If we were to address the blocks we'd be doing psychology. We're not skilled at that. Our job is to give people the experience that they are creative at the same time. Now, if someone brings up a block, we listen to it, we hear it - and if we were therapists we'd then address the block and what's in the block and take it apart. We instead then go around the backdoor and invite the creativity in the individual to come out - and they are surprised, 'My God, I had this block, but I am also creative?' So, their creativity often melts their own blocks (Allen Schoer, see page 162).*

TAI also instructs its clients to adopt an asset based approach towards their audiences (see page 173). The asset based approach which TAI shares with regularly collaborating management consultant Kathy Cramer is rooted in positive psychology and stands in direct contrast to the work of the other co-researchers, most overtly Arlene Audergon whose practice has Jungian roots and thus champions confrontation with shadow material as the gateway to the self. Arlene's rigour lies here: in paying attention to what a client tries to ignore and suppress, and what is causing him discomfort.

*If you take those unexpected signals and you go into them, take their view, unfold them ... what seems disturbing, like a tick and the last thing you'd want, is actually the beginning of a whole discovery process, revealing parts of yourself you aren't that familiar with (Arlene, see page 94).*

We shall explore personal resistances as gateway to deeper self-access when we come to explore the psychosomatics of Theatre as a Transformative Practice (see page 263).

### **On innate knowledge**

Matt Mitler asserts that the transgression of ordinary self-limits leads to "an organic truth" (see page 214), a cultivation of a person's innate knowledge, a level of knowing which is affirmed by all of the co-researchers. Julia Varley calls it her "special intelligence" (see page 118) which, she asserts, is accessible only by a living of the questions, by a deep trust in the unknown.

*And this trust in a process of this kind where you know how to proceed but you don't know what will come out comes from the work as an actor, from the training, from the work on performances that I don't think another person would have. It's like other people need to be much more secure about where they are going and what will happen, what they're aiming at... (Julia, see page 117).*

Julia's words illustrate the heuristic nature of the actor's work. Julia also believes that the deep immersion in the world of inner experience is the way of the feminine, it is "a woman's contribution to the world" (ibid).

Similar to Matt Mitler's line of thought, Antero Alli speaks of direct experience triggered by initiation.

*Paratheatrical rituals are intended to facilitate a more direct experience of the existing conditions of one's life, regardless of its nature or what you think, feel or fear about it. Imagine the least mediated perception and experience you are personally capable of. This is the experiment, the process and the goal (see page 128).*

To Antero, the purpose of the work revolves much around vertical integrity, the strengthening of one's awareness of the vertical sources and the courage to follow their messages and to bring them to fruition. To Antero this means working towards liberating oneself from "decades of socially-conditioned, externally-directed habit patterns" and freeing oneself from the "creations of the conceptual mind to experience life more directly" (see page 128).

TAI also aim to bring clients into a direct relationship with themselves.

*We do a fundamental piece of work called the 'tell'. A tell is a midden in archaeological terms, a tell is a heap. We [...] are telling about ourselves, but we're also digging into this archaeological midden that is our life. [...] we dig and peel those layers away... and find out what is that is that core of our existence (Graeme, see page 161).*

*...one of the greatest jobs we can do as human beings is help others learn more about themselves from themselves. That's the work we do, it's cultivating first-hand knowledge. If you invest in exploring your own creativity and vision, you are going to be in the realm of first-hand knowledge (Allen, see page 161).*

### **On responsibility as response-ability**

Crucially, the approaches of my co-researchers are tailored to the capacity for responsibility or rather **response-ability** of the individuals they engage with, and here we find a major axis of differentiation between approaches with an inclusive orientation (TAI, Arlene Audergon) and approaches with an exclusive orientation (Workcenter, Ang Gey Pin, ParaTheatrical ReSearch, Odin Teatret). Inclusive approaches tend to place equal responsibility for the unfolding of

inner work on the facilitator (the therapist, the coach) and the client of the work. Within TAI, for example, Kathy Cramer asserts that the workshop leaders are required to take responsibility for what is unfolding within the client. More than just staying present, they have to figure out how to move each person's process forward productively. They have to take a directive role.

*"... in order for you to lead it ... you have to make yourself responsible for that, there is a certain energy quality that is beyond being present. It's being responsible for figuring out what happens next (Kathy Cramer, see Appendix K.3, p. 27).*

Conversely, exclusive approaches tend to demand high levels of response-ability from the doer of the work (the actor, the ritual practitioner) who cannot rely on the director or guide of the work to sustain and contain his/her inner processes. The term 'exclusive' captures something of the exceptional demand placed upon the individual to respond to challenging circumstances with inner openness and grace. Antero Alli particularly emphasises the degree of self-discipline and responsibility required for paratheatrical work:

*My role is not as psychotherapist who helps process people's anxiety attacks and emotions but more as a guide to point people to their own direct experience. [...] Whether that experience is difficult or easy, pleasurable or discomforting, the point here is one of me encouraging and challenging your commitment to your own experience which, in turn, provides opportunity to develop your integrity (see page 130).*

Dzieci takes up a uniquely centred position within the spectrum of inclusive to exclusive approaches, demanding high levels of response-ability from its members whilst working with individuals in hospitals and community settings, who are largely unable to take responsibility for their own welfare. Within these settings Matt Mitler asserts that Dzieci's approach is furthermore unique in that it utilises an alchemical principle to facilitate an evolutionary process within those with whom it engages.

*...what we do is: come into the situation at a (seemingly) lower level than the patients. They then reach out to help us and lift us up to their level. In alchemy this follows the dictum: The lower meets the higher, becomes the middle. We find this in metaphysics, physics, and all esoteric teachings. So, the lower (Dzieci) meets the higher (patients) and becomes the middle (improvisational event). Except that Dzieci only appears to be the lower, dressed as fools and acting scared. In reality we are the higher, and as the patients reach down to help us up they are actually reaching up and ascending. We are reaching down but are being*

*passive. They are active and moving up. This then creates a path that is evolutionary (Matt, see page 217).*

Dzieci use Buffoonery in community and in clinical settings, allowing the wisdom of the fool to come to the fore. Referring to their work with children, Matt elucidates that the Buffoons' innocence and humility gradually wins them the trust of the children who

*...fall off a table into their arms, then the children fall into each other's arms and finally the staff people fall into the children's arms. That final role reversal of the staff person trusting the children empowers the children with the pride of having caught him. 'That trust goes on after the performance,' Mitler says. 'We leave and something changes. They see the therapist or staff person differently, and the staff person sees the patient differently' (see Appendix K.5, p. 26).*

### **On the asocial intent**

I found that in exclusive approaches, the individual actor's response-ability was supported by an asocial intent of the group. Antero Alli most clearly articulated the meaning of the asocial intent: Whilst social intents and actions may satisfy our esteem needs and our needs for love and belongingness, asocial intents and actions aim to bypass social needs and desires in favour of heightened integrity and autonomy which "minimizes socially ingrained obligations such as seeking or giving assurance, approval or providing unnecessary parental protection or acting out courtship behaviors" (see page 131). Whilst the asocial intent was most articulated by Antero, I encountered it also in the work of Dzieci, the Workcenter and Ang Gey Pin, all of whom promoted a primarily non-verbal approach to their work (e.g. Jesse Hathaway, see Appendix K.5, p. 64). Work with asocial intent does not negate profound relationships between the members of a group. Indeed, it can contribute to nurturing profound states of communion. In relation to ParaTheatrical ReSearch I emphasised that the challenge of work with asocial intent is one of relating to the others whilst remaining true to one's internal sources.

*... the energy we're drawing upon is from internal and vertical sources, not from each other. This is not a theatre of taking, we're approaching a theatre of offering, by securing enough access to internal sources of energy ... so that when you're ready to relate with others there is a sense of offering (Antero Alli, see page 135).*

This sense of offering carries strong resonance with Grotowski's idea that the actor in performance must strive to make a total gift of himself, with the aim to achieve profound intimacy between the spectator and himself (see page 57). John Chung, a newcomer to the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch perceived the asocial intent as both an opportunity and a trap. He felt that the group was continually walking a fine line between withdrawal (fostering an incapability for deeper, interpersonal relationship) and presence (fostering the capability for embodied spontaneity based on verticality). Such is the challenge of the work. That profound relationships can be achieved without the need for social interaction is illustrated by the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch's Nick Walker who is autistic and who regards his condition as a big advantage for the work (see Appendix K.2, p. 50).

The concern for a profound and authentic relationship with others is also strongly present in inclusive approaches. TAI defines responsibility as the individual's ability to be present with other persons, to be in authentic relationship with them. TAI aims to foster such responsibility within the client, not by taking an asocial approach but by being deeply engaged with others. I personally encountered and battled with the issues of responsibility and relationship when partaking in the Creative Dynamic, in which I had felt the need for more embodied work and had intended to make an offer to the group but had failed to act in relationship to the individuals present.

*Instead of acting on impulse I could have raised my own need and idea as part of the verbal discussion. Perhaps if I had fully committed to my impulse and followed it through instead of aborting the action as it was unfolding all would have turned out quite different. As Gifford says, it's "not about stifling impulses or sitting on them. But it is about doing something that keeps you in relationship" (see Appendix K.3, p. 42).*

I noted that the crucial question is one of channelling an impulse in such a way that is unfolds and fits naturally into the structure into which it is released. This question of the balance between impulse and structure is one with which performing artists are faced all the time. They need to follow scores of action in very rigorous ways, respect every minute detail of a choreography - and yet their discipline and rigour is only one part of the equation. Structure devoid of raw impulses is lifeless, empty form. And yet impulse not tempered by structure leads only to self-indulgent soup. The balance of impulse with structure is further explored on page 260.



## On commitment and integrity

My co-researchers highlight commitment to the work as a vital ingredient of Theatre as a Transformative Practice. Within the framework of paratheatrical ritual processes Antero Alli asserts that commitment to the unfolding moment fosters personal development and growth, whereas lack of commitment promotes stagnation.

*... part of the challenge of the medium is to your own integrity ... emotionally and psychologically and spiritually. And so emotional honesty and my integrity as an individual, meaning my ability to commit to and follow through whatever truthful emotional and physical direction develops, my integrity is tested by my capacity to follow through to the end and not just go half way (Antero, see page 128).*

During The Alchemy Laboratory I noticed that my own commitment to the work was giving life to the processes I was exploring. Increased commitment resulted in increased psychophysical energy and connection to a particular source. My ability to follow through was what sustained the momentum in the connection and brought about articulation through entrainment with and amplification of a source. 'Following through' did not mean pushing or forcing the process - instead it meant listening inwardly, patiently, increasing presence, awareness and receptivity, and letting go of the desire to control the outcome.

To Antero engagement with the paratheatrical medium is a spiritual path through which he connects with the deepest crevasses of his inner experience; and the commitment to paying attention, to listening to the revelations of the vertical sources and to giving them the space and time to manifest through creative expression is the silver lining of Antero's practice.

*I find that my artistic development depends on this and that I'm not really able to develop as an artist unless I can bring to fruition every single direction ... all the way to the end. And then, by outgrowing that direction I'm able to start at a new level and grow (Antero, see page 128).*

Antero's notions of the actor's commitment to his path resonate with Jerzy Grotowski's and Thomas Richards' concern of the 'artist as tourist', which, as I highlighted in the depiction of the Workcenter, presents a significant methodological and personal challenge to me. I will come to address this challenge in Chapter 7 when I come to reflect upon the heuristic inquiry and my engagement with it. Centrally Thomas Richards emphasises that the craft of the actor demands a serious long-term commitment to his path (see Appendix K.4, p. 24).

Tai also emphasises the importance of long-term commitment in order to facilitate transformation within individuals (see page 167), and as such the company endeavours to

develop sustained relationships with its clients. As Twila Thompson and Allen Schoer suggest, introductory workshops may trigger profound experiences and insights - however, deep change of internal patterns is only achieved through continual practice which will take years.

*And so, do we encourage people to work with us on a one-off basis? No. The work is developmental, there is always a syllabus and it's always over time. You continue to deepen and deepen and deepen the practice (Allen, see page 167).*

Similarly, Gey Pin asserts, "The key, Jessica, is the practice. It never ends" (see page 197). Odin Teatret and its actors, most of who have been with the company for several decades, particularly illustrate the meaning and value of long-term commitment to the craft. Theatre as a Transformative Practice can be easily accessible as TAI demonstrates through its work with non-actors, however, it is certainly no quick fix.

## **2. Presence**

*...being completely present in the moment, in what you do, it's one of the biggest aims for me in training, to train the actor to be present in the moment, to be completely present in the action and at the same time to be completely open to what is happening around him or her (Roberta, see page 111).*

My co-researchers regard 'presence' as the primary gateway to Theatre as a Transformative Practice. Before all else, the path of transformation demands presence, which in the terminology of my co-researchers is accompanied by 'non-judgemental awareness', 'sats', 'snorkelling' and 'a double arrow of attention'.

### **On absence versus presence**

Matt Mitler shared with me his personal journey from absence to presence in performance (see page 207). He described his early performance attempts as almost entirely unconscious, transporting him into states of disembodiment and trance. Importantly Matt highlighted how unconscious performance depleted him. He described that he was using himself as fuel. It is Matt's work within the Gurdjieffian tradition which helped him develop his inner awareness and which led him away from depletion and towards inner attention and rejuvenation in performance. Ever since, Matt has made a rigorous effort to be present in his performance practice. The development of inner awareness is a major component in the work of Dzieci. As Matt affirms,

*We don't do theatre to become good actors or because we want to be on stage, we do theatre because we find it the most efficacious way of developing attention. The effort of being present in theatre is in a way more demanding than being present in life but more possible because it's an artificial situation, under artificial conditions (see page 208).*

### **On snorkelling**

Drawing parallels between theatrical performance and the process of individuation, Arlene Audergon similarly asserts that conscious awareness in performance makes for good theatre, as well as promoting growth in the individual.

*It's not like being self-conscious ... you're in it [the drama, JB] and you're conscious at the same time. And to me that's good theatre. And that is what it means to individuate. To be in your life, to be in all those weird parts and to be conscious (see page 95).*

Arlene recognises that good actors seem to 'lose' themselves in the performance of their part, whilst, at the same time, remaining conscious. She refers to this paradox of simultaneous presence and immersive loss of self as snorkelling.

*...it's a bit of a shamanic thing, to dive in ... but it's not the same as just diving in and then drowning! You dive in and you are aware, you're conscious inside of it. In process work we used to say it's like having a snorkel. [...] A really good theatre moment can be more real than real life! It can cut into something that is really human (see page 96).*

### **On presence in adversity**

Following the principle that challenge and discomfort are part and parcel of Theatre as a Transformative Practice, Dzieci demands presence in performance even in adverse conditions. As ensemble member Bob Strock suggests, to practice inner work in meditative and reclusive surroundings is relatively easy. However, to remain present in challenging environments, such as prisons or psychiatric wards, is much harder.

*We set ourselves up for battle conditions and still do this internal work. It really approximates the totality of experience, rather than a safe, comfortable shell [...] You become accustomed to responding to intense situations in a state of presence ... and maintaining that presence and centring your attention on what needs to be attended to, knowing what that is and making that choice (Bob, see Appendix K.5, p. 38).*

Bob who at the time of interview was undergoing training in clinical psychology further describes that Dzieci's persistent practice of inner awareness in battle conditions has helped him greatly in his clinical work where he is often faced with challenging patients (see Appendix K.5, p. 37), on whom his presence seems to have a calming effect.

### **On non-judgemental awareness**

In the terminology of TAI, the actor's presence is achieved by non-judgemental awareness which is a key component of TAI's asset-based approach. At the beginning of TAI's workshops, clients are led through observation exercises which ask them become more aware of their environment and other persons without judging, classifying or labelling. As Elise DeRosa repeatedly emphasises "seeing what's in front of me is the first and foremost thing" (see page 180). TAI further encourages its clients to maintain awareness without an immediate emotional response and attachment. The message is to notice, to investigate without becoming personally involved or attached.

Beyond the striving for observation without judgement and immediate emotional reaction, TAI's asset based orientation moves the company to adopt what Carl Rogers called an attitude of 'unconditional positive regard' towards the client. TAI's staff focus their attention on what compels them about the person, what attracts them and inspires them. TAI's exercises in non-judgemental awareness lead me to reflect on the neutrality of human perceptions and relationships, which are, as Marie Louise von Franz puts it, never free from projection (see page 84). Indeed, our beliefs and worldviews are the lenses through which we grasp the world. I will come to articulate the dynamic of 'projection' on page 271.

### **On pure presence**

When Eugenio Barba refers to actors performing their own absence, he means something quite different from the absence of conscious awareness described by Matt Mitler. My encounter with Odin Teatret brings to light the concept of 'pure presence', that is a performer's pre-expressive presence, presence devoid of expression and of representation. Eugenio suggests that such presence is an oxymoron to the Western performer but a common idea in Oriental traditions. Crucially Eugenio highlights that codified acting styles create the possibility of pure presence. It is the organic, pre-expressive tension of the performer of a codified tradition which renders his body theatrically alive, communicating through a "muscular trance" (see page 103) which excites the nervous system of the spectator even

before the performer enters into personal expression and presentation. Eugenio highlights that the performer's presence is sustained by a body which is alive even in immobility: a body of 'precarious balance' (see page 104), dancing a 'dance of opposites' (see page 104), a flowing body which is in constant conscious relationship with itself and its environment.

### **On de-automatisation**

Articulating Odin Teatret's approach I suggested that codified performance work demands 'contemplation in action' (see page 105), facilitating within the actor a de-automatisation of established motor behaviour and mental attitudes through a rigorous re-education of the bodymind; and that such contemplation in action would lead the actor to profound states of heightened attention and awareness. Odin's approach reminds of Dzieci's path which is in part grounded in the Work of Gurdjieff. Former member of Dzieci Stephen Shelley who is also immersed in Gurdjieff Work compares Gurdjieff's 'Movements' to Dzieci's physical practice and he describes his experience of attempting impossibly difficult movement sequences with the aim to remain fully conscious of all elements, whilst staying in relationship to the movement as a whole.

*...it's really about being in the middle of all those things, all those very difficult forces, and having some relationship to these forces. So, if you can find a way not so much to nail the movement, although you are trying to do this movement, but what you're really trying to do is to see yourself struggling with these different parts. One of the fortunate or unfortunate parts of being a person is that unless you're struggling you can't really evolve (see Appendix K.5, p. 46).*

Following Gurdjieff's terminology Stephen calls such work with presence and awareness an opportunity for 'self-remembering'. The aim of such action is to facilitate an awakening of the mind and body, a process of de-automatisation which deepens the relationship with one's environment, props and fellow actors, counteracting the ordinary process of automatisation of one's behaviour, perception and thought processes (see page 50).

### **On bodily presence**

Eugenio Barba and the actors of Odin Teatret centrally highlight the role of the actor's body in scenic presence. Presence is as much a somatic as a psychological phenomenon. Odin Teatret use the term 'sats' to describe "energy suspended in immobility, it is the extra-daily body, the decided body ready for action" (see page 112). Scenic presence is fundamentally a psychosomatic presence, an awareness which penetrates into the invisible impulses which

unfold at the cellular level. Julia Varley refers to “an intelligence of the body” (see page 116), “way of thinking which is not in the head but which is in the cells” (ibid), and further the “breathing of the cells” (see page 118). The metaphor of breath reflects the quality of movement in presence: outward movement ... into the world beyond the body, and inward movement ... returning and receiving. Julia elaborates,

*...the cells in my body are thinking and they are passing on knowledge, one to the other. One can also call it intuition but the word intuition is like tied to something else. It is like you use an intelligence which comes from experience - but experience that you don't remember with your head (see page 116).*

Antero similarly speaks of ‘cellular choreographies’, that is movement “rooted in the cellular experience” (see page 144) of the individual. When one is able to access the body’s own organic responses, when one can “pay attention to the innate patterns of motion that ooze out of the body’s own rhythms and cycles” (ibid) one can work towards serving those innate rhythms whilst honing and distilling them, “gradually and gently, without killing them” (ibid).

### **On the direction of attention**

My co-researchers’ work with attention and awareness has a directional quality which manifests differently in each practice.

Members of Dzieci most overtly articulate their work with awareness as ‘double arrow of attention’, a simultaneous working with inner and outer orientation. As Matt Mitler explains, work with the double arrow of attention means “not to be absorbed with my inner orientation” but to be attentive to inner processes whilst being aware of “my outer process [...] in such a way that I am receiving the process” (see page 210). Referring back to his early performance work, Matt elucidates that he was not receiving his audiences, instead he was reacting to them. *Receiving* the audience is not the same as *reacting* to its presence and energy. Reception requires consciousness, whereas reaction can be instinctual and thus unconscious.

Ensemble member Rebecca Sokoll describes work with the double arrow of attention as the backbone of Dzieci practice which connects her to a sense of inner balance and a sense of the sacred. She believes that Dzieci approaches the sacred through the work with attention, through the double-ended arrow of attention. Rebecca also emphasises that work with attention is easier within a group. “It always helps if you have someone sitting across from you who is doing the same thing. It increases the resonance” (see Appendix K.5, p. 51). Fellow actor Jesse Hathaway also refers to Dzieci’s work with the double arrow of attention.

*Ideally, a fifty - fifty, or one hundred - one hundred split of attention upon oneself and one's surroundings, increasing layers of attention. Ritual is about attention: focusing attention, it's about communicating something (see Appendix K.5, p. 64).*

Stephen Shelley highlights that the concept of the 'double-pointed arrow of attention' emerged from Gurdjieff's Work. He further expresses that Gurdjieff's movement exercises were designed to train precisely that kind of divided attention.

*My feet are doing one thing, my arms are doing another thing, my head is doing a third thing and so clearly my attention cannot be in one place at one time. It's kind of split up and that's kind of not a natural movement for me or anybody that I've seen out of the corner of my eye fumble with the Movements as much as I. And I think there is a certain idea in Dzieci to find that, too (see Appendix K.5, p. 46).*

Within the work of Ang Gey Pin I found a similar double-ended approach to the work with attention. The work seemed to unfold along axes of opposing directions. Staying in relationship with one's outer working environment whilst being attentive to and following one's inner associations and impulses was one such set of seemingly paradoxical instructions. It demanded from the group a double arrow of attention, a cultivation of simultaneous awareness of outer circumstances and inner impulses both of which were forever changing, fluctuating in response to one another (see page 191).

TAI also operates along a double arrow of attention. Clients are asked to become more aware of their audiences whilst remaining grounded in the body. This said, the work is perhaps more strongly focused on placing one's awareness on 'the other', i.e. the spectator, the witness of the work (e.g. see page 173).

In ParaTheatrical Research work with attention seemed to unfold along another axis altogether, bringing into play the differentiation between vertical and horizontal dimensions of being. Antero Alli speaks of

*...an overlay of vertical and horizontal sources, or planes of existence; vertical and horizontal. Picture vertical as the invisible sources of energy innate to soul, ancestral karma, dreambody, archetypes, planetary consciousness. Horizontal sources and energies refer to visible manifestations of our interactions with others, society, political realities, and the out-there world at large (see page 127).*

In their work, Antero and his colleagues engage both with horizontal and vertical sources, making their approach one of the more overtly transpersonal of my co-researchers. I would suggest that whilst TAI places awareness on 'the other', ParaTheatrical ReSearch engages more intentionally with the 'Other', Capital 'O', i.e. the ineffable twin of the 'I' whom Grotstein (2008) referred to as "ineffable subject of the unconscious" (see page 77). John

Chung called ParaTheatrical ReSearch a form of “depth theatre” (see Appendix K.2, p. 64). A seasoned performer and playback theatre actor, John finds that most theatre functions on a horizontal level. It is his search for the vertical dimension which pulled him towards ParaTheatrical ReSearch. To John, verticality implies deep engagement with the collective realms which connect all of humanity. However, John does not want to lose sight of the horizontal which can also facilitate a “fantastic expansion of the self” (see Appendix K.2, p. 67) through deep engagement with other human beings. John does not want to become a “vertical monad” (see Appendix K.2, p. 65).

*I think there is a way in which ‘vertical source’ can become just this kind of narrow cosmic straw, through which you are sucking the nectar of the transcendental gods - but it becomes this fetishized connection ... this is my DSL connection to the cosmic databank - which for me takes away from the ever present way of connecting with everyone ... and everything that is right here, right now (see Appendix K.2, p. 68).*

Dzieci also engages with what Matt Mitler and his colleagues call ‘the higher’ in order to approach the Sacred in their work. Dzieci is officially incorporated as a church with Matt as its certified chaplain, and it is intuitively aligned with the Rule of Saint Benedict.

*I’m looking for the higher. I want to put myself under the higher. I want my work and my community that is Dzieci to be part of a larger body that is committed to higher work (Matt, see page 213).*

*When I was at the abbey [...] the first time I picked up the rules of St. Benedict. And I was astonished: There are so many rules that we have adopted in Dzieci, verbally or non-verbally, which are the same. It seems totally natural [...] And Mother Prioress just looked at me and said, ‘You’re Benedictine!’ (ibid)*

Matt Mitler is keen to stress, however, that Dzieci does not solely seek out engagement with the higher, transpersonal dimensions of the human soul - it also engages vigorously with the lower, gritty world of human existence.

*...we have done services for Ascension and for someone who is dead, and next thing we’re in a nightclub, performing a striptease Burlesque piece as Eastern European idiots. This thing of moving backwards and forwards between different worlds, so that we’re not just these holy relics and we’re also not just these goofy clowns. But we keep shifting backwards and forwards between these worlds, because each world informs the other and together they make a complete world. And a complete exploration of the self (see page 214).*

Dzieci firmly aligns itself with the art of the Buffoon, the wise fool, the trickster who like the Indian Baul with whom Grotowski engaged in Theatre of Sources (see Appendix K.5, p. 24) “turns everything upside down. Preferably in a humorous way, but not without pathos” (see



page 216). The Buffoon is not merely a clown. Instead s/he acts with a “very passive presence” (ibid), a notion which we will come to explore in the theme ‘movement and repose’ (see page 247). When I watched Dzieci’s production of *Fools Mass* I was particularly taken by the actors’ surprising honesty in their enactment of fools.

*The madness portrayed seemed to originate from the edges within, the struggles and wounds of each individual. How could I tell? Hard to say. Their madness felt authentic. Not a charade of insanity, but an unmasking of inner struggle, exposing a sincere vulnerability (Jessica, see Appendix K.5, p. 25).*

### **3. Absence**

#### **On the actor’s emptiness**

Pointing to a paradox of presence and absence, Roberta Carreri of Odin Teatret describes her scenic presence as a state of ‘emptiness’ in which she is completely open and doesn’t think but simply reacts to her outer environment, i.e. her actor colleagues, the audience, etc.

*...to be present is to have gone through a long rehearsal period where all the knowledge has been embodied, where all the scores have been embodied - and then be completely empty, to not remember anything before coming on the stage. And when I am in I just react...” (Roberta, see page 112).*

The depictions of her experience seem to stand in contrast to Matt’s earlier articulation of presence during performance which requires him precisely not to *react* unconsciously to the audience and the performance situation but to make a conscious effort to *receive* it. However, the difference in perspective is really only one of terminology. Like Matt, Roberta asserts that the actor must work with inner awareness (see page 113), however she does not speak overtly of inner and outer orientation. Roberta’s depiction of the actor’s need to be ‘empty’ also resonates with Ang Gey Pin’s notion of the actor needing to ‘un-prepare’ (see page 199).

#### **On the via negativa**

Notions of emptiness and unpreparing are reminiscent of Grotowski’s Via Negativa. Interestingly, here Eugenio Barba warns that the Via Negativa is but a beautiful metaphor, which is misunderstood and the practical application of which is limited. He asserts that actor training is still essentially a process of acquiring new habits.

*If you have to learn something you don't start by taking things away from you. You wear thought ... how to dance in a certain way, how to move, so what Grotowski is saying there is a sort of beautiful paradox - but it does not apply when you work (see page 122).*

Eugenio suggests that what is being stripped away in training are the actor's personal impediments, as well as his/her clichés (the established patterns of performance behaviour) which in improvisation manifest as the actor's initial choices. It is through the imposition of physical scores that the actor is estranged from his/her cliché, that behaviour is de-automatised and that the actor is forced to act with inner awareness. Odin actress Julia Varley describes this process as a progressive embodiment which initially requires a lot of attention. After a certain amount of practice Julia describes reaching a point when the score becomes automatic and requires less conscious effort, but it's not yet free. "It's not yet at the point where the performance starts speaking to you because you are no longer preoccupied with it" (see page 119). At this stage, Julia emphasises that "I need to engage myself to be engaged" (ibid). Finally, after having performed the score often enough, it facilitates a different kind of flow within her, leading her to a place where "you no longer know" (ibid).

### **On no-form**

The notion of the actor's emptiness resonates profoundly with the practice of no-form in ParaTheatrical ReSearch. Antero Alli likens no-form to a standing Zen meditation which is "more a precursor to action than as a gateway to Buddhist Samadhi" (see page 133) and which invites "initiatic experience" (ibid), that is direct experience of one's innate knowledge. Antero elucidates that to the mind, initiatic experience represents a challenge, a threat which nonetheless contains within itself the seed for real personal transformation.

*Any time an individual is asked to open up their mind to void or emptiness, to begin to interact with a state of existence that in some ways represents what the mind has not created, that represents what exists beyond the mind can create ... any time we are involved with increasing awareness ... right away the seeds of a transformative practice are planted (see page 134).*

To Antero, the mind is the master of the illusory world of certainty which continuously attempts to create a consistent storyline where there is only the present moment. Antero acknowledges the importance of the intellectual mind. It creates stability and meaning within a world dominated by uncertainty. However, Antero suggests that the mind also imposes limitations upon the individual which can lead to stagnation, frustration, meaninglessness, disempowerment, inner impoverishment and illness. The purpose of no-form then is to help performers approach *internal emergency states* in which "you're in a position of waking up to

the objective reality of uncertainty” (see page 134); and the engagement with such states is the objective of the rituals which no-form frames and which are at the heart of Antero’s paratheatrical labs. Newcomer to ParaTheatrical ReSearch John Chung likened no-form to the core practice of Qigong.

*...the idea that the body is perfectly stacked, everything perfectly aligned so that the energies can flow right through it, you’re completely at ease, present with the world, you’re connected to the earth, your roots are reaching down towards the earth, your spirit reaches higher and higher towards the heavens (see Appendix K.2, p. 66).*

Achieving no-form is not an easy venture. John Chung describes his struggles with the practice (ibid), admitting that his experience of no-form was largely not very profound. He found it difficult to drop into a place of refined awareness and he suggests that it was the constant moving backwards and forwards from no-form practice to raw physical expression which impaired his experience. Tracking my own experiences of approaching no-form (see page 150) I initially articulated the practice as a confrontation with the frenzy of my mind, a wrestling with stillness. Later, I became less identified with my thoughts and images and my awareness shifted towards the continuous arising of images and thoughts. I became more aware of the gaps between the events that were my thoughts, sensations and images - and I knew that these gaps were more truly no-form than the elaborate events which unfolded between the gaps. I also gained deeper insight into the importance of no-form in source relations.

*I discovered that no-form is in relationship with Source. Without one, the other could not exist. The void ... something needs to withdraw for Source to unfold. It's the withdrawal of God before creation. I feel as if I am embodying that. And this insight ... like the others ... is experiential ... somatic ... visual ... and only then, later on, conceptual (see page 151).*

Later still, I was able to dis-identify further from the emerging imagery and a deep sense emerged that ‘I’ and all emergence was held by a Great Palm of awareness which carried and contained all that was and is - a deeply rooted universal intelligence which some may call God. Void to me became a womb of pregnant emptiness...

### **On sunyata**

Antero Alli’s notions of no-form find strong resonance in Nagarjuna’s concept of Sunyata (see page 101), which Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba explored in the early years of their collaboration. Eugenio elucidates that Grotowski attempted to apply the concept of Sunyata to the path of the actor. However, as with the Via Negativa, Eugenio warns of presumptuousness (see page 122). He suggests that the actor’s emptiness is a simple

concentration on the present moment which is not automatically congruous with the Void of which Buddhists speak. The actor may strive for such emptiness, yet Sunyata is an ideal which we may never reach - as Grotowski (1990) articulated it in his text *Performer*. In speaking of Sunyata, Eugenio emphasises that the actor must remain in relationship with the rest of the ensemble, and he has to adapt and respond to the other performers and to director who is orchestrating the whole.

### **On stillness and silence**

Dzieci's equivalent to no-form are stillness and silence. At the beginning of their work, members of Dzieci often sit or stand in a circle, "as a way of searching inwardly and paying attention to where we are as a group" (Matt, see page 211). Matt also describes the practice as a Zen meditation. However, in keeping with Dzieci's principles, members of the group attempt to maintain both an inner and outer orientation at the same time.

Antero Alli's no-form and Dzieci's work with stillness resonate in aim with the observation exercises employed by TAI to achieve a state of non-judgemental awareness. However, I would submit that ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci (as overtly vertical, transpersonal approaches) differ from TAI in terms of extent and depth of practice. Dzieci also gather again in silence at the end of their work. Matt elucidates that the gathering at the end is specifically to measure the change in the group's and individual's state.

*We want to feel the vibration of what we've just done and measure our state of energy from what it was before to what it is now; to see if it's moved in an evolutionary manner, if the energy is finer or coarser. [...] We do it for self-change. If I have a transformational experience of some sort, then the audience can have a similar experience. If I'm false, it's manipulative. It always comes down to us working on ourselves (see page 211).*

Matt further emphasises that the practice of stillness and silence is a key ingredient of Dzieci's work in hospital settings, where it helps him connect and relate compassionately to any patient, even those who may appear unpleasant.

#### 4. The Attenuation of 'I'

Centrally, my co-researchers' work with no-form, stillness and silence invokes an attenuation of the ordinary 'I', that is egoic consciousness. My co-researchers speak of this attenuation in varied ways:

Within the context of Dzieci, Jesse Hathaway asserts that ritual work involves a "bypassing of the 'me'" (see Appendix K.5, p. 66), invoking a heightened sense of vulnerability and authenticity which is grounded in the present moment. Jesse also speaks more radically of 'peeling back the layers' and 'destroying oneself' "...to challenge the status quo and to challenge the sense of ourselves as much as possible" (see Appendix K.5, p. 67).

Within the context of Odin Teatret, both Roberta Carreri (see page 107) and Julia Varley (see page 115) speak of a permanent loss and rebirth of identity through practice.

JoJo Razor of ParaTheatrical ReSearch speaks of ego surrender. JoJo explains that whilst the ego is her vehicle in everyday life, which helps her create and express herself, it is not ultimately in charge and during ritual work "my ego knows that it has to take the back seat" (see Appendix K.2, p. 58). Describing the attenuation of her egoic self from a physical perspective JoJo expresses that

*I have to press myself very thinly around the inside of my body. So that this powerful thing can emerge [...] I have to get out of its way. [...] I have to press myself very thinly to the inside of who I am (see page 139).*

The notion of letting go also resonates with the staff of TAI who speak of surrender to one's deepest desires, i.e. not the cravings of the insatiable ego but "...what we call your personal vision [...] something, **some thing**, flowing through you ... that wants to express itself through you" (Gifford Booth, see page 182). Gifford asserts, that the pursuit of one's personal vision really demands one's surrender to the deeper within, a form of ego attunement.

*"...vision exists in you and each of us has a unique vision. When you let go of the shoulds, when you let go of your 'here is how I have to do it' ... when you surrender to vision ... desires will form, also the way to accomplish those desires will manifest, so it is about letting go. It is about surrendering to something inside you" (ibid).*

Gifford concludes that following one's personal vision means to follow and to enact whatever is "in integrity and in congruency with who you are" (see page 183).

In the work of Ang Gey Pin ego surrender becomes the capacity to let oneself go and to follow the physical impulses, to follow the songs. My capacity for surrender found direct expression in the song 'Fallen' which I shared with Gey Pin.

*When I worked with Gey Pin, Fallen came to me ... and I was able to let go. And as I surrendered, crying and shaking, I paid attention to nothing but my service of the song. My throat de-contracted, my larynx opened and the song began to move through me, speak through me and fill the spaces within me and around me with a deep resonance. My feeling of liberation lasted only a moment - then 'I' stepped back in, trying to maintain the opening ... and failing. But 'I' had surrendered long enough that Jessica had caught a profound glimpse of the possibilities of working with songs. [...] Over time, I slowly discovered more depth in each song, realising that each single note in a melody was a gateway to the deeper meeting which I had experienced in my initial moment of surrender. In each note there was a microcosm so vast that one could live in it. To live the songs was the aim and the journey (Jessica, see page 199).*

My capacity for surrender was challenged in my encounters with both Gey Pin and the Workcenter. I found myself wrapped up in a battle between intellect and body. I dug into memories, developed physical scores of actions, worked on associations, yet also questioned the work, struggled to make sense of it and lost faith in my work and abilities as a performer.

*I believe that Gey Pin's central motive was to help me discover an inner flow of associations originating not from the conscious mind, but from the body. As in the work with songs and physical exercises, she helped me explore how one might channel the never ending steam of associations and impulses through a fixed score of actions. And as in the other components of the work, the key was to live the questions, to be receptive and to follow the stream of inner life instead of attempting to find answers (see page 202).*

Dzieci member Jesse Hathaway expressed the same understanding of ego surrender, that is to live the questions and to engage with the mystery.

*"... 'figuring out' is a bad thing. [...] you want just enough to pose more questions but you don't want to absolutely figure it out because [...] you would cease to be, there would be no point to exist" (see Appendix K.5, p. 68).*

Antero Alli makes a distinction between a 'big ego' (which is inflated), a 'strong ego' (which is assertive, yet flexible) and a 'weak ego' (which is under-developed). Antero suggests that in ritual work people with a big ego quickly run against a wall. They cannot enter the transpersonal domains, because they are caught up in egoic affairs, their need to control the ritual process kills any creative potential. Conversely, people with a weak ego quickly become overwhelmed by the ritual process and they lose themselves. Antero asserts that a strong and flexible ego is best suited for ritual theatre work, that is an ego which is assertive and yet

pliable, meaning that it has the capacity to sustain the inner work whilst yielding to it (see page 149).

Antero's colleague Nick Walker suggests that it is the concept of ego surrender which makes the path of ParaTheatrical ReSearch an exclusive practice. "Most souls are not advanced enough ... most of them have not been around for long enough. They're still working on having an ego - the idea of surrendering it ... no, no. Too far out there" (see Appendix K.2, p. 46). Like Antero, Nick believes that ritual work requires one to develop a flexible ego, capable of absorbing the shock of encountering something bigger than itself. Nick is very wary of ego transcendence. He regards many people's desire for self transcendence as escapism.

### **On will and grace**

Odin Teatret's Eugenio Barba asserts humility as prerequisite for inner work. He suggests that it is the craft of the actor which enables him to face that which is bigger than himself (see page 121). Eugenio believes that spiritual terminology in the actor's rehearsal room can lead to a lack of humility and to inflated self-importance. Instead, Eugenio uses a terminology of the craft, emphasizing the actor as artisan who works on his score as a potter works on clay, or a carver on a piece of wood. Similarly, Jesse Hathaway of Dzieci asserts that the ensemble's work is not

*... for glory hounds. It will humble you. You will face your own sense of humility and worth in it. And I think the only people that stay, or continue to get something out of it, are people who are involved in a huge amount of inner work (see page 221).*

Jesse's colleague Rebecca Sokoll particularly emphasises need for failure and redemption within the practice.

*It's about the failure and the redemption and the building of sacred energy through continuing to work and continuing to try and failing and trying again and having redemption, having the ascending movement happen within this framework of simplicity, following these rules of ... you can't get there by climbing the ladder. You have to get there by stumbling. And by crawling and being filthy (see Appendix K.5, p. 50).*

TAI's Allen Schoer asserts that in the work, non-performers sometimes do better than professionally trained actors, because they approach the work with less self-investment.

*...sometimes some of the most authentic work comes from people who are not in the theatre. Because they don't have the investment, the charge on 'doing it well'. They are just up there. And they are simple and vulnerable and they are probably more humane. And they don't have all the craft, the skill, the technique (see page 166).*

Ang Gey Pin regards the work of the actor as an opportunity for self-exposure, in which one must not indulge but find a way of balancing will with love.

*You get the chance to be exposed. But it's not to indulge in this. In the work we expose what in the normal social situation we will try to hide. That's why this kind of work is not easy. And it is not for everybody. So, the will, once the calling arrives... the will [...] has to give way. Like in this conversation, we are in some deep love - and you cannot exert some kind of idea, some thinking is there, yes, but you cannot form a love for someone, a deeper love, if you form an idea of that. The idea will kill that possibility of looking and discovering and being this nourishing love (see page 197).*

Dzieci member Yvonne Brechbühler describes the work as a form of mediumship (see Appendix K.5, p. 57). Yvonne asserts that the performer must not pump emotion or impose premeditated emotion upon the text but s/he must simply be present in the moment - a truth which I rediscovered the hard way when presenting my work at the Workcenter (see Appendix K.4, p. 22).

Along similar lines, Antero Alli of ParaTheatrical ReSearch asserts that the inner work of the actor is non-directional rather than directional.

*...the energy itself guides the direction rather than our personal will. This requires an ability to relax the desire to control or direct the energy. When the force of the energy is strong enough to move your body, you follow its direction. [...] Like clay in the hands of a sculptor, we learn to be 'shaped' before we start shaping. Allow yourself to be 'created' before you start creating (see page 139).*

Working colleague JoJo Razor likens the process to channelling. "...there is information that is being given to me. It's put inside of me. 'This is for you'" (see Appendix K.2, p. 55). JoJo feels that the sources of the information are "just behind the veil" (ibid) and thus concealed from egoic consciousness. Twila Thompson of TAI also likens her work as a coach to a channelling process (see page 174).

Several of my co-researchers also speak of surrender to and service of a Divine or Universal Will.

*I do profoundly believe that each of us has the propensity to become as God ... or one with God, in whatever sense we use that word. And that is not a license to exert our will, it's a license to exert Universal Will. And through this exercise in*



*... serving oneself and realising that oneself is greater than oneself, [...] the true essence of the action will carry itself out (Jesse Hathaway, see Appendix K.5, p. 66).*

*I live my life, attempting to be a vessel for the will of God, attempting to allow myself to be a vessel for whatever way God chooses to have me express the love of God in the world (Nick Walker, see Appendix K.2, p. 48).*

### ***On controlled abandonment***

Earlier I noted that my co-researchers' work revolves much around the challenge of channelling spontaneous impulses into given structures, such as physical scores of action, choreographed movements and text. Within this context Antero Alli speaks of the cultivation of *active receptivity* which he contrasts with *passive receptivity*, i.e. a deep openness to one's inner sources, leaving one numb and adrift. In contrast, active receptivity fosters pro-activity, independence and autonomy, by encouraging the individual to position him-/herself in relation to the sources explored.

Antero elaborates that active receptivity requires a balance of precision with spontaneity. The latter is the surrender to one's inner stream-of-impulses which naturally leads to messy and unpredictable expression (see page 143) and which does not lend itself to any form of communication with an audience. Precision, on the other hand, has to do with the development of "choreography and form and structure, enabling communication of certain states or conditions or aspects of humanity" (see page 144). Antero relates precision to the intellect which wants to shape and control the outcome of one's work. Crucially he notes that one must become adept in both directions: spontaneity and precision. "Those people who are adept in the precision line of direction ... they end up developing a very precise and technically evolved style that is dead. They have killed the spontaneity" (see page 144).

The balanced approach involves what I would call a *controlled abandonment*, a losing of oneself whilst simultaneously keeping track of one's work as it unfolds in relationship to the inner and outer landscape, self and others. In this controlled abandonment it is the ego which is attuned and yet the actor still asserts some control, so that emerging impulses are channelled into a given performance or ritual structure. Controlled abandonment is a central element of the actor's inner work which is closely related to the concept of 'wei wu wei' or 'movement and repose'.

### **Movement and repose**

*Jesus said, 'If they say to you, 'Where did you come from?' say to them, 'We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established [itself] and became manifest through their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?', say, 'We are its children, we are the elect of the Living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the sign of your father in you?', say to them, 'It is movement and repose' (Thomas, 50).*

The principle of movement and repose is firmly acknowledged in the work of Dzieci. Referring to the Gospel of Thomas, Matt Mitler asserts that “action without presence or prayer can only lead to a descending movement. The idea is that the two are together: contemplation and action” (see page 213). Movement and repose thus raises one’s level of consciousness, it commits one to “higher work” (ibid), work towards the Sacred or the service of vertical sources as Antero Alli might put it. Matt emphasises that “It’s not movement OR repose, it’s movement AND repose - so, how can I be in action with this inner attentiveness, this contemplative effort” (see page 214).

Similarly, Dzieci members Rebecca Sokoll and Bob Strock suggest that the central conditions for approaching the Sacred (in Dzieci, as well as more generally) are attention, presence and stillness. Bob also refers to movement and repose (see Appendix K.50, p. 40).

Former member of Dzieci Stephen Shelley speaks of “prayer” and a “plea for awareness of a higher level” (see Appendix K.5, p. 47). He expresses that he experienced heightened states of energy and awareness particularly during some of Dzieci’s retreats “when you are a little more available, I also think being in nature is helpful, around trees, in the woods” (ibid). Stephen likens the effect to that of his daily meditation practice.

*This energy that I, let’s call it ‘earn’ through my own suffering, it can remember myself. Me as I am in my coarse life here can’t really do that. I have to be evolved or transformed so that magical experience can happen, can come forward.*

*I find that by sitting on some occasions I can feel that finer energy, throughout the day perhaps and certainly after I sit because I have given up my habitual movements for a while so that I can find a relationship with a part of myself that’s a little different, not so ordinary or pedestrian (ibid).*

Dzieci’s understanding of movement and repose mirrors Antero Alli’s who, as we have seen, speaks of the cultivation of ‘active receptivity’; and both Dzieci and ParaTheatrical ReSearch resonate profoundly with Grotowski’s ideas depicted in *Performer* (see page 66). In articulating his ideas, Grotowski acknowledged Meister Eckhart as a central figure of influence, who was also of profound importance to Carl Jung - who in turn claimed movement and repose to be a central tenet of psychoanalysis.

*“The art of letting things happen, action through non-action, letting go of oneself as taught by Meister Eckhart, became for me the key that opens the door to the way. We must be able to let things happen in the psyche” (Jung, 1995, GW 13, par. 20).*

Movement and repose also finds congruence in the concept of *wei wu wei* (無爲, Chinese: *wu* may be translated as “without”, *wei* as “do”, “act” or “effort”. The translation of *wei wu wei* is thus “action without action” or “effort without effort”). *Wei wu wei* is a central tenet in Chinese philosophy, notably Taoism. More than ‘doing the right thing’ or ‘doing the natural thing’, it means doing from a state of profound equilibrium. The idea of effortless action is also an important component in martial arts, such as Tai Ji as practiced by Ang Gey Pin, and Aikido which has become the foundation of my own physical training. Within these traditions, to act from a state equilibrium means to act from one’s inner centre; and within Gey Pin’s approach such work with the *Dāntián* or *Tanden*, i.e. one’s physical centre of gravity, is fundamental (see page 190).

In his own study of Taoism Carl Jung was drawn towards the notion of circular movement around the centre which, he regarded as a symbol for the unification of opposites in the psyche, finding archetypal expression in the symbol of the Mandala (e.g. 1995, GW 13, pars. 31 - 45). Through circular movement the opposites are united into a higher wholeness which transcends the original, lower state of contradiction and paradox.

### **In the way of paradox...**

The path toward attenuation of the ‘I’ is marked by an engagement with opposites. My co-researchers express and articulate their practice, making numerous references to ‘contradictions’, ‘polarities’ and ‘paradoxes’ in their work. As Dzieci’s Yvonne Brechbühler asserts,

*These paradoxes, I find them constantly. That is where God sits for me. In the paradox. That is where Dzieci connects to my spirituality. Where I am connected to that state of being which is love and openness, connecting to you, to the world. [...] when I am in myself, centred, which is all about me ... I’m sensing myself ... there is a lot of sensation ... to bring the energy into me ... and free breath ... and allowing myself to be seen and seeing ... and it’s moments, just glimpses of that. And that’s when I feel most responsive and open and connected to my partner. So, that’s why I say, I’m really with myself and really an extension of the other and with the other (see Appendix K.5, p. 56).*

Within ParaTheatrical ReSearch, the performers specifically work with polarities as a means to challenge the ego’s superficial levels of insight and render it more flexible and receptive to

deeper, embodied ways of knowing. I depicted how such work with a pair of opposites involved an act of conscious projection, through which the performers first 'charged' the designated ritual space with the polarity and then entered into the space and subjected themselves to their own psychic material, thereby peeling away layers of conditioning and penetrating ever deeper into the personal and transpersonal sources of the polarity.

*By repeated exposure to opposing sides of oneself, it becomes more difficult to fixate on any one side over the other. A more malleable ego results, one that can permit more reality, i.e. more than one side of Self. [...] Alchemically speaking, the body acts as a kind of vessel for containing, mixing, transforming and refining the ongoing union of opposites that these polarisations catalyze (Antero Alli, see page 136).*

Within The Alchemy Laboratory we worked with polarities both on an individual basis and within the group, exploring a great range of themes. As the weeks progressed I became aware how pairs of opposites began to lose their definition, becoming less distinct and contradictory. What emerged was indeed a continuum of insight which continually surprised me and gave me new insights.

Julia Varley of Odin suggests that theatre thrives on contradiction, whereas in the world 'out there' contradictions and opposition tend to result in conflict, physical violence and war.

In theatre, the contradiction, the opposition is what makes you creative. It is what gives meaning to your performances. And that is where I think we have a much bigger responsibility as actors in this world, because we know that opposites can be contained in one action, and we know that different stories, different opinions can be in the same action (see page 120).

However, therapist and mediator Arlene Audergon describes how opposition and polarity can also be utilised in the transcendence of conflicts and the healing of individuals and groups.

*You can say that transformation happens through the need to polarise at first. To really find out what a conflict is about ... instead of trying to keep it down ... you really bring it out ... by going deeply into both sides (see page 99).*

Her descriptions remind much of Antero Alli's work with polarities. By subjecting oneself to both sides of a polarity, one begins to grasp that two contradictory experiences or points of view are really an expression of a larger whole. I relate Arlene's insights to my own experiences of mediation with Jacqueline Morineau and CMFM in the late 1990s in which we practiced being present with both parties of a conflict, going deeply into both sides, with awareness, accepting that each side was expressing something equally true.

My encounters with Odin Teatret bring to light the physical dimension of the actor's work with polarities or opposites. In his writings Eugenio Barba speaks of the dilated body as a balance of opposing tensions, a dance of opposites. He refers to the Japanese term '*hippari hai*'

*...which means 'to pull something or someone towards oneself while the other person or thing is trying to do the same'. Hippari hai is found between the upper and the lower parts of the actor's body, as well as between the front and back. There is also hippari hai between the actors and the musicians, who in fact do not play in unison but try to move away from each other, alternately surprising each other, interrupting each other's tempo, yet not going so far apart as to lose the contact, the particular bond which puts them in opposition (see page 105).*

Reflecting upon the polarity of 'vertical and horizontal', John Chung from ParaTheatrical ReSearch contributes the notion that on a physical level, polarities may be reconciled through spirals.

*The human body is constructed on spirals, the intricate musculature and fascial layers are layered like spirals upon spirals upon spirals, like a huge artichoke. This innate architecture shapes the effortless syntax of power that Tai Ji expresses: the spiralling 'silk-reeling' movement that is typical of Tai Ji (manifesting the horizontal within the vertical; expressing the vertical inside the horizontal) (see Appendix K.2, p. 72).*

I am again reminded of Aikido which uses spirals in a similar fashion - as John describes, "the horizontal to redirect energy, and the vertical to compress and connect to the ground [...], both of which happen at the same time" (ibid).

### **On Altered States of Consciousness (ASC)**

During my work with ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci, I discovered how physical work can lead to the attenuation of 'I' and to Altered States of Consciousness (see page 148 for ParaTheatrical ReSearch and page 221 For Dzieci).

ParaTheatrical ReSearch's Nick Walker who has experimented with many ways of accessing ASC, using hypnosis, shamanic journeying and mind-altering substances, finds that the states he has experienced during hypnosis are most similar to the states he has entered in paratheatre - however, paratheatre is "more directly body oriented and movement oriented" (see Appendix K.2, p. 50) and "The access happens differently" (ibid ). Nonetheless, "you're still saying that this particular temporal-spatial trigger will take you from this receptive

state into accessing or activating access to a particular thing ... which will then inform your consciousness and your experience" (ibid).

Comparing her states of consciousness during the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch to ASC induced by psychotropic drugs, JoJo finds that her experiences in the labs bear some resemblance to experiences she has made with LSD. "...it's like a dream, that's what it's really like. It can change at any moment and I am ... sometimes my body comes into view in the dream and at other times the dream is just presented to me and I'm watching it" (see Appendix K.2, p. 56).

Such depictions of ASC stand in contrast to my experiences of TAI's approach which was strongly reliant on verbal interaction. In my depiction of the company's work I questioned if egoic attunement could be achieved in an environment where words dominate (see page 185). Clearly, Freud demonstrated that a deeper self-access can be achieved through verbal play (free association). Similarly, Surrealist writers played with language to enter into a state of pure psychic automatism, that is an attunement of egoic thought. However, within TAI, as I experienced it, there was only occasional attunement of egoic thought.

Within ParaTheatrical ReSearch the issue of language also arose. Newcomer John Chung described how languaging of the processes in sharing circles at the end of each session impeded his progress.

*...we got caught up in the language, in the terminology [...] 'Today, I had a great relationship with Source!' ... 'I couldn't get Source, where was my Source?' ... 'I looked for Source and I couldn't find it!' [...] that language was a big hurdle for me (see Appendix K.2, p. 72).*

John felt that the languaging of processes and experiences in the sessions created a Cartesian dichotomy where perhaps none should be, and he asserted that sometimes language can get in the way of a deeper way of working.

### **On memory**

Gey Pin describes that her work with songs demands from her that she engage in a paradoxical process of 'forgetting and remembering'. Initially, she learns a song in all its technical details - but once it is fully remembered, she allows herself to forget it.

*...then I meet the song again. And I guess it happens in life as well. Our friends, old friends, new friends, and even ourselves. Each day you wake up you need to forget something again. Tibetans do this. I wake up. I forget. But how to forget things?*

*Are you crazy? Let's say I go to a place I have been to in the past ... my body remembers. Sure. But also ... how can I manage not to be blocked by this memory? Of course, I remember something - but ... I'm meeting a new friend today. And by practising, really practising, one song becomes thousands of songs because it speaks to another part of me each time (see page 196).*

Gey Pin firmly asserts that there are no fixed ways to approach the work with songs, that each trick or strategy quickly becomes a trap and that one must trust one's body from which all memories emerge. Speaking from her experience she asserts, "...the more I forget, the next time I have much more associations and memories, I don't know why" (see page 197) and "I tell myself, 'I forget all these songs now.' Immediately it's the body" (ibid).

In my depiction of Antero's work I highlighted the idea of state-dependent memory, memory which is only accessible in the state of mind in which it was first created. In line with Gey Pin's thinking Antero emphasises the importance of no-form in memory recall:

*The thing is ... once you can access a particular state and you can let it go ... there is a greater chance of recall. It's actually when you remain attached that the recall is more difficult. What happens when you dis-identify from the state, no matter how wonderful it is, is that you create some space between you and that condition. And that space is what the memory and the recall requires. If you're too glued to it ... I think it inhibits the memory function (see page 149).*

I proposed that Antero's description gives emphasis to the role of the inner witness in memory function. If one loses oneself in the encounter with a source, then the memory is state-dependent and the experience sinks back below the threshold of consciousness and it is forgotten until a connection with that particular source is rekindled during a subsequent ritual - in a sense one was never truly conscious of that particular source. However, if one manages to remain present and to balance immersion and abandonment with awareness and control, one is more able to integrate source encounters into egoic awareness.

The theme of 'witness' in Theatre as a Transformative Practice is further articulated on page 266.

## **5. Psyche and Soma**

*"Our actions are our children, for better or worse. Thus, when I identify myself with my actions, it is in them that I find my strength. In presenting them to others I reaffirm my own identity" (Roberta Carreri, see page 108).*

All my co-researchers stress that Theatre as Transformative Practice engages the totality of the human being. It is a deeply psycho-somatic process, neither predominantly psychological nor physical. The actor who is present in his work encounters the reality of his bodymind. His ego becomes progressively exposed to the psycho-physical dynamics of his being. His practice unfolds in the collision of his memories, of his beliefs and of his imagination with the outer world, i.e. the performance space, his props and costumes, and his co-workers who are similarly engaged.



## On the Creative Dynamic

TAI submit that the perception of the outer world is shaped by the patterns of the actor's inner world. On a most fundamental level we are what we believe. Twila Thompson, Allen Schoer and Gifford Booth strongly relate to the idea that "the entire universe is a creative mind and your intention can actually shift what's happening" (Twila, see page 164). Gifford further asserts the generative power of words: "...what you say, manifests. So what you speak about comes into being" (see page 164). Tai articulate the creative dynamic as a universal human phenomenon in which

*...we manifest our world according to our beliefs - self-limiting or self-liberating. Elise also emphasises that we have a natural tendency to re-enforce our emotions and beliefs (Jessica, see page 181).*

Twila suggests that if a person's creative force is in some way suppressed and doesn't have a natural outlet for expression, it may manifest itself in destructive ways. Thus, the staff of TAI are intent on helping individuals strip away their self-limiting beliefs, so that they can begin to realise their unique potential.

*Very often what gets in the road of that is all this other stuff is other people telling you what you can do and can't do. Other viewpoints gradually build up to create a picture of you that you have to wear like a sleeve (Graeme, see page 160).*

Similarly, JoJo Razor of ParaTheatrical ReSearch relates that self-limiting beliefs cut her off from her creative spark. JoJo feels that from the age of five, she had to dissociate from her deeper self and focus on the material nature of reality (see Appendix K.2, p. 56). Arlene Audergon also asserts that people's belief systems create deeply embodied barriers within.

*...there's a belief system [...] There is an edge ... and beyond that you say 'That's not me'. A person shouldn't flirt. Or a person shouldn't be demanding. Yes? That's a belief system; it's cultural and so on. And it keeps us apart from certain aspects of ourselves (see page 93).*

Antero Alli speaks of self-limiting beliefs as "decades of socially-conditioned, externally-directed habit patterns" (see page 128) which lead to a lack of 'vertical integrity', that is a lack of integrity to one's individual and trans-individual sources. Antero regards ParaTheatrical ReSearch as his path of commitment to his deepest sources of inspiration.

Where my co-researchers, and particularly TAI and ParaTheatrical ReSearch, differ is in their methods to deepen self-access. TAI attempts self-penetration through a deep 'Socratic' engagement with its clients (see page 161). Members of the company highlight the

importance of being in an authentic relationship with one's co-workers and audiences. Attenuation of the ego and self surrender occur through 'the other', 'the witness'. Where TAI stress the importance of a profound relationship with one's audience, ParaTheatrical ReSearch focus on the more esoteric surrender to one's inner 'sources'. As previously elaborated, TAI takes a horizontal, ParaTheatrical ReSearch a vertical approach.

### **On contact points and body signals**

Antero and his colleagues speak of engagement with sources through personal 'contact points'. These are 'hot spots', areas of the body through which the sought source is already expressing itself within one's psychophysiology.

*The contact point is wherever direct, intuitive absorption of a particular energetic state is already happening; one has only to locate it. It already exists in the body as a source of energy. This is an important point to grasp, as the qualities and energies explored in this medium are not always of the imagination. Our biology emanates a complexity of energy dynamics most of which, like the organs themselves, cannot be seen yet each remain vital to the organism as a whole. In fact, these sources of energy are expressions of higher emanations of which our physical organs are also manifestations (Antero, see page 138).*

When I participated in The Alchemy Laboratory I experienced entering into source relations through contact points, before Antero articulated the idea to me. I noticed that each theme seemed to draw my attention to sensations and impulses for action in a particular part of my body. It was my proactive amplification of these sensations and impulses which led me to outer embodiment and expression. On more rare occasions in The Alchemy Lab I noticed that the contact point - whilst still precise in location - seemed to exist beyond my physical body in the space around me. Antero later described to me that

*The contact point can also be discovered 'non-locally' in the auric field enveloping the physical body and in the space beyond the body's aura, in any area of the setting designated to a particular source (see page 139).*

As I discovered for myself in The Alchemy Laboratory, source work also unfolds in collision with the outer space which can act as a trigger.

*I'm on the floor. Rolling, turning, constant fluctuation in movement, constant movement. I begin to turn my body in a circular motion ... using my legs to push off and around. Like the hands of a clock I turn ... but anti-clockwise. The motion triggers an image. I'm in a dark, vertical tunnel, climbing upwards ... towards the light. [...] I can feel sunlight on my face and arms. (The sunlight is real. My physical body has reached a spot of sunlight on the floor of the workshop space.)*

*What is and what isn't real? Aspects of the inner correspond with the outer ... and both shape one another.... (Jessica, see page 139).*

JoJo Razor of ParaTheatrical ReSearch compares the body to a radio transistor. She says that one just needs to tune in to receive the sources. She believes that sourcing sometimes involves accessing the archetypal and mythic realms, sometimes it means working with ancestral dynamics and karma, and sometimes with genetic memory (see Appendix K.2, p. 59).

Where Antero and his colleagues speak of ritual work with sources through contact points, Arlene Audergon who is steeped in Arnold Mindell's Jungian approach describes engaging with a client's *dream figures* through body signals. Arlene asserts that a person's night time dreams continue to unfold during the day and that they manifest in form of physical symptoms, or body signals, which are the physical corollaries of the dream figures.

*The dreams are actually here ... while we're awake. And they send signals (see page 93).*

*...the symptom is the signal that needs unfolding. It has information in it that's useful. It's the body dreaming, you can say ... and the dream is bringing information for your evolution (ibid).*

Whilst TAI describe their approach as internal and embodied, they do not work with body signals in the specific way that ParaTheatrical ReSearch or Arlene Audergon do. Nonetheless, they describe a psychosomatic attunement between coach and client.

*I put all my attention on them ... I see very clearly ... and then I take on their bodies. I mirror them ... and then I know what's going on. This all happens in split seconds. I mirror them. I put myself in their shoes (Gifford, see page 172).*

Allen Schoer also affirms the supraordinate quality of fictive characters.

*I've often talked in my work about interpreting a character and being guided by a character. If we interpret a character, which is a good way for a beginning actor, here we begin to learn intellectually about what the character is saying and what is said about the character - but eventually as we [...] work deeply, we must allow for how the character guides us (see page 166).*

Allen's insight resonates with Arlene Audergon's understanding that in inspired performances the actor's character is also his dream figure, meaning that through his character work the actor has managed to tap into unconscious, possibly even collective, archetypal material.

*...what was a really amazing discovery for me - like Eureka! I was so excited - was that the signals that are being sent are the actor's unconscious psychology, right, parts of themselves they don't know, BUT they were ALSO signals sent by the*

*character of the show. It's amazing. If the character is an archetype ... and you're engaging with the character ... these archetypes come straight through and signal through the performer's complex or psychology, so if you work on these signals, you come to an interface between what is very personal and what is universal ... that person's growing edge (Arlene, see page 95).*

The interior, body-centred approach is also very apparent in the work of Dzieci and Ang Gey Pin. As Gey Pin repeatedly expresses, “my body remembers” (see page 196) and “it’s in the body” (see page 197). Dzieci member Bob Strock draws on his training in clinical psychology and references the work of Eugene Gendlin who developed ‘Focusing’ (see page 78). Bob believes that Focusing strongly resembles Dzieci’s work with heightened body awareness which Bob describes in detail (see Appendix K.5, pp. 38 - 39).

### **On amplification**

ParaTheatrical ReSearch, as well as Arlene Audergon, engage with contact points and body signals by means of amplification. To amplify means to make more conscious, to feel the contact point or body signal more deeply, to identify with it and to give it expression. Arlene Audergon describes the process of unfolding a body signal as highly theatrical. A client’s symptom becomes the gateway to inner healing as well as leading to very authentic performances (see page 92).

In the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch high levels of physical and vocal ability need to be matched with equally skilful entrainment with a source to allow for its optimum articulation and expression. Entrainment is enabled through the commitment to increase one’s inner receptivity and through one’s capacity to resonate with a source, to become a conduit (see page 142). Entrainment in turn leads to amplification of a source through movements not yet visible and audible. Articulation is the final spilling out of such micro-movements into visible patterns of motion, gestures, postures and audible sounds and utterings. When these patterns of motion become honed and refined Antero speaks of cellular choreographies. When cellular choreographies can be put in service of collective expression, that is when the performers are able to interact with one another whilst maintaining their source relations, individual choreographies become ritual actions (see page 144).

My engagement with ParaTheatrical ReSearch brought to what kind of physical work may aid or hinder amplification of body signals.

*That which brings me close is [...] sometimes repetitive, often growing in intensity, marked by sustained commitment to the process and deeply somatic. That which*

*brings me close may involve voice ...quirky sounds and humming ... clapping, tapping and stamping (see page 148).*

Conversely, that which removed me from source relations

*...is heady, thoughtful, intellectually loaded, indecisive, trapped in a decision-making process and trying too hard. It is a heavy body, a heavy heart, a lapsing commitment and a lack of energy and boredom (see page 148).*

Amplification unfolded primarily through movement and sound. However, occasionally word play and association came to the fore and enabled me to relate to a particular source. I also became more aware of how physical insight preceded verbal knowing.

*From No-Form I must enter 'fear' ... to reach 'commitment'. 'I can't do this! I can't' ... reverberates strongly around my body and mind. 'I can't!' I'm thrown to the floor ... I drag my body along ... 'I can't!' I enter the conversion zone. Something shifts. 'Jessica!' My name. 'Jessica ... Jess ... i ... ca. .... Jess ... i ... can. .... Yes ... I ... can. - Yes I can!' I can do this. My name says so! I am so. I can (ibid).*

Antero contrasts spontaneous ritual actions with rigid ritual postures and movement sequences. Antero acknowledges that practice of rigid forms can be the right way forward for some people, pointing towards the Gurdjieff Work as an example. However, for Antero vulnerability to a particular energy source takes precedence over adhering to prescribed forms. Instead of conforming to set postures and movements, he prefers conforming to his inner landscape and the postures and movements it elicits.

*This work is my Yoga. For some reason I have a real problem with conforming to any physical form that hasn't come out of my own experience. But that's my own eccentricity. It's probably more the exception. There are more people that can and do find value in Yoga, or conforming to physical postures or positionings that are pre-made (see page 145).*

Nonetheless acknowledging the power of physical postures, Antero highlights that one can memorise peak moments of deep self-access by holding a highly charged body gesture for a certain length of time which "encode[s] the living essence of that peak moment into cellular memory for future recall" (see page 145).

Whilst describing her work with songs, Ang Gey Pin also depicts a process of psychosomatic amplification. As she expresses,

*The song provokes something in us. It's the first step. Then ... maybe there is some kind of deeper part in us that is asking [...] It's a kind of inner conversation. It's like the song becomes a conversation or confrontation. [...] there is something linked to our dreams,*

*our nightmares, our situation in life. And we need to face that. So, there is a note that is confronting us in a certain part of our body (see page 194).*

*Each sound if we really sing it well in tune ... it is resonating in a certain part of our spine. [...] That is why it's working on the person. But we mustn't focus too much on the technical part of the song. Too much analysing. As I'm singing my body starts to remember something in the past. And I start to have associations. Images which I don't know where they come from. They could be from my subconscious somewhere. Like a dream (ibid).*

Gey Pin believes that the spontaneous play with physical exercises supports and nourishes the association processes in the work with songs.

*It's like my attention is much more open. And my memory arrives even more. And the associations are much freer. And I start to become freer because I don't need to hold on to any kind of tools ... not even the previous associations like 'OK, now I have ten associations which I will use today...' - No, it will not work. Planning does not work. So, when I let go I see that next time another ten thousand associations will come (see page 194).*

### **On spontaneity and structure**

*... no matter how creative we feel ourselves to be, we have no channel for our creative force without technique. Technique means craftsmanship, a technical knowledge of our craft. The stronger your creativity is, the stronger your craft must be, in order to arrive at the needed equilibrium which will let your resources flow fully. If we lack this ground level, we surely land in the mud (Thomas Richards, see Appendix K.4, p. 24).*

In their work my co-researchers emphasise a balance between spontaneity and structure, impulse and technique. Antero Alli who in his early career had reached a high proficiency in mime found that this began to act as an impediment, a cage, deadening his impulses (see Appendix K.2, p. 3). He now prefers to conform not to outer structure but to his inner sources and the impulses they provide.

In my encounters with Ang Gey Pin and the Workcenter I found that they are more centrally placed on the 'structure - spontaneity' spectrum, demanding a rigorous balance between the two. Whilst working with Gey Pin on physical exercises, songs and acting scores, she asked us to approach our work in a playful and organic way, whilst pushing us to remain precise and rigorous. We played with each other. It was a play driven by the body, not the mind. Our play triggered associations, sensations, images, memories. Gey Pin asked us to follow those associations, to live them and give them expression, without losing ourselves in them. At the

same time she continuously intervened, creating many rules during our work that I found it difficult to pay inward attention and allow the body to voice its organic responses. Gey Pin's approach stood in stark contrast to the work I had experienced with ParaTheatrical ReSearch where a gradual approach seemed encouraged - and I knew that my experience of Antero's approach had profoundly helped me in my training with Gey Pin.

Gey Pin's work with songs also operated along a continuum of directions, ranging from a focus on diligent craftsmanship to the emphasis of impulse and associative work. Whilst we had to adhere strictly to the melody and tempo-rhythm of a song, we had to surrender to the calling of the song and let it take us where it needed to go. We had to find the song in the body, sensing what it wanted, where it wanted to go. When our minds were trying to impose intentions on the song, Gey Pin seemed to sense the manipulation. She asserted, that "Actions which are not lived take place in a kind of slow motion ... controlled by the intellect" (see page 193).

When exploring the work of Odin Teatret I discovered another orientation within the 'structure - spontaneity' spectrum. Whilst also working with their inner impulses, Odin's actors are strongly influenced by codified traditions and they work extensively with highly structured scores of action, which de-automatise their performance behaviour, shift them into an extra-daily condition and heighten their proprioception and awareness. As such, I propose that Odin actors find themselves closer to the 'structure' end of the spectrum.

Whether working from the inside out (from impulse to structure), or from the outside in (from structure to impulse), my co-researchers emphasise the role of the body in their work and they reject a purely psychological approach (e.g. Julia Varley, see page 116 & Jesse Hathaway, see Appendix K.5, p. 67).

### **On double-signalling versus congruence**

*We do it all day long. We send a certain bunch of signals that are intended and then other signals are coming on their own without our awareness ... and those are being sent by dream figures (Arlene Audergon, see page 94).*

Arlene refers to the simultaneous sending of intentional and unintentional body signals as double-signalling. Double-signalling is a sign that a person lacks internal awareness. Double signals create incongruence.

Odin actress Julia Varley recalls watching video recordings of herself in training, through which she was able to spot her own inconsistencies. "I hated looking at myself on the video because

what was there was so different from what I thought was there” (see Appendix K. 1, p. 23). Nonetheless, the honest and impartial feedback of the camera helped her become more congruous and authentic, as did the feedback of her colleagues.

Within the context of TAI’s corporate work Kathy Cramer, Gifford Booth and Elise DeRosa speak of the client’s accountability which is kept in check by the coach who acts as a mirror to the client.

*As coaches all of us [...] reflect back if the participant stayed with us and what kind of impact they were creating. What kind of results they’re getting. As kind of an outside eye ... and keeping them accountable. [...] That’s the big thing: accountability. [As performers] [W]e can say that we want to create something and then we put out something else over and over again. We’re saying that we want to create ‘blue’ and what we’re putting out is ‘red’ (Elise, see page 186).*

Like Arlene, Elise puts the client’s incongruence down to a lack of self-awareness.

*...it’s a really difficult thing to have that level of self-awareness and insight into our actions and into what it is that we’re putting out there into the world. And we’re really, really bad at giving ourselves feedback. We have a whole series of perceptions that we walk around with which are often in complete opposition to what is actually showing up in the room (see page 186).*

Arlene elaborates that congruence comes from intentionally picking up on unwanted signals, “inhabiting them and recognising and acknowledging ‘That is me too’” (see page 94). Arlene asserts that within entertainment contexts the most compelling moments of performances unfold when the actor is able to embrace and identify with his body signals and fully live his dream figures through his fictive character. “You can’t see double signals anymore. There is a wholeness; there is that same congruence that I had seen in the psychological work ... you see it there. The actors are really doing it” (see page 94).

It was perhaps such congruence which Roberta Carreri perceived in the actors of Odin Teatret when she first encountered the company. As she expresses, “I felt a great coherence in what they were doing. I felt that there were people who were doing what they were saying” (see page 107).

Julia Varley highlights that authentic actions particularly involve the spine.

*...if I really have to do something, my back is immediately engaged. So, that’s how you find that engagement, even if you’re doing actions which are just theatrical. It’s how you find the real in the fiction (see page 118).*



She elaborates that in inexperienced actors movement is often dominated by the head, by conscious thought, and there is a separation between the actor's consciousness and the actions of the body.

*That is what happens to the young actors in Ur-Hamlet. They have the consciousness in their head, and they try to create it with their body, trying to be expressive, and you end up doing a whole lot of things which are not useful. They are not needed for the action. BUT on the other hand, to just do what is needed is very difficult. It needs the years of training to understand it in your body (see page 119).*

### **On resistance as source**

*...actors are often trying to rid themselves of certain signals that they think aren't working for them. And the idea in process work is the opposite. If you take those unexpected signals and you go into them, take their view, unfold them ... what seems disturbing, like a tick and the last thing you'd want, is actually the beginning of a whole discovery process, revealing parts of yourself you aren't that familiar with (Arlene, see page 94).*

Most of my co-researchers express that uncomfortable body signals, those unwanted symptoms and ticks which one is inclined to ignore and suppress are truly the gateway to a deeper work on oneself. Members of ParaTheatrical ReSearch view their own resistances and blocks as sources of energy. If they cannot connect to a particular theme proposed by Antero, he encourages them to commit to, serve and to express that disconnection. Antero proposes that any resistance is

*...frozen energy found in specific regions of the body and/or as an overall tension or brittleness. Resistance can also result from any aspect of Self that you, or the voices in your head, judge as being wrong. Resistance can also express natural aversions to, or contractions from, what you experience as toxic or painful. [...] Sometimes a web of inhibitions accumulates around a particularly strong resistance and it forms a taboo, a kind of psychic lockup dynamic forbidding self-exposure. When resistance itself is resisted, more tension and body/psychic armour accumulate around the initial resistance, or taboo (see page 142).*

Antero invites his co-workers to sanctify resistance by yielding to it and by giving it expression, letting the body blend with it, no matter how contorted the expression may need to be. As The Alchemy Laboratory progressed I began to appreciate resistance as my guiding compass, faithfully pointing me towards aspects of myself which were 'dying for my commitment', i.e. aspects which were in need of attention and integration. The key was always to serve 'resistance as source'.

Within Dzieci, the performers' personal resistances and blocks also inform the work. Antero and Matt work towards similar aims. Both primarily regard theatre as a spiritual work on the self, a service of something higher than the self, and they do not pursue theatre as therapy. As Matt emphasises,

*The aim is that whatever you have in the moment is what you work with. [...] You're not there to work on what you have ... you're there to take what you have and put it into the work. So, there is a different orientation. One is ... the arrow points to me. My needs, my wants, my imbalances. And the other is that those qualities and needs and wants are put towards a service (see page 206).*

Here, Arlene Audergon's approach sits at the opposite end of the spectrum, for Process Work is a professional therapy practice, and Arlene's clients come to discover and work on their needs and imbalances.

On resistance as source, Kathy Cramer suggests that the work of TAI can trigger the surfacing of shadow material in clients, and she describes the self-discovery process triggered as Jungian (see page 176). Twila Thompson of TAI who has engaged extensively with people suffering from AIDS deeply believes that illness and dis-ease can be sources of creativity in one's life, and she helps her clients to shift their perception and to feel empowered even in adverse circumstances.

*...the thing that you keep trying to overcome in your life: what if that's a source of creativity in your life rather than something that you need to keep overcoming? A great many artists come from dysfunctional families and they've drawn on that to create. So, there is something about the creative aspect ... it's ultimately very empowering [...] And with the AIDS Mastery [i.e. the workshop which Twila delivered for people experiencing AIDS, JB] what we saw was that people who started to feel more creative about themselves and started to experience themselves in that way ... also lived longer. I mean, it's anecdotal but [...] I think all the work, even the work we do in the corporate sector today - we come in under this guise of 'We're going to train you to become better speakers' and all of a sudden they start realising that this is not about becoming technically a better speaker - it's about 'What do I have to say and what's the impact I want to make?' (see Appendix K. 3, p. 10).*

Twila believes that it was this shift in self perception which triggered improvements in health in many of the AIDS afflicted workshop participants. The *AIDS Mastery* empowered its participants to reclaim creative ownership of their lives and to re-create themselves through behaviour patterns which were constructive rather than destructive.

Ang Gey Pin, too, recognises the value of personal obstacles and resistances. Her training at the Workcenter challenged her on many levels, professional and personal (see page 196). Gey

Pin believes that performers must face their resistances, in order to become more open and free in their work. “When I adjust the spine it’s how not to contract certain parts - or to let that contraction have the space to speak. Because that has been there for a long time” (see page 195). Whatever the block or difficulty, the challenge is to face it, to let it speak - not to contract further and to hide.

*I have this fear, worry or whatever. If it’s there, it’s there. We cannot avoid fear. We cannot avoid other thoughts that come to us. Even now I am thinking how to not let myself go into a kind of contraction. That is important, approaching the work even in training, in doing our action, in doing our singing of the song (see page 195).*

Matt Mitler further contributes the crucial insight that in the work with resistance and obstacles we may find that a personal emergency may well be an opportunity for a spiritual emergence.

*I believed, [...] that madness sprung from an organic need for personal transformation; a revolutionary transformation. I believed if genuine madness was supported and nourished in a certain way it could be a passage through this sort of dark inner struggle, opening into something light (see Appendix K.5, p. 7).*

## **On containment**

In both ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci, the performer’s skill of containment aids the engagement with the deeper sources beyond the self. Containment is the ability to sense individual and group boundaries, to ensure that the energies encountered and evoked in the various rituals are not carelessly dispensed and dispersed.

Matt Mitler highlights containment as an essential component of Dzieci’s work with inner awareness. Containment is achieved through awareness of the body, one’s “own physical sensations” (see page 208). Yvonne Brechbühler describes how Dzieci combines energy containment with impulse work. She asserts that one can be mindful and present in spontaneous work.

*...you can be instantly present and there and connected and act on your impulses - and yet you work from your centre. And the work is to feel that centre, that presence, that state. And connecting the three: mind, body and emotions. [...] And to me that’s the work, that’s good theatre work. And that’s also what I look for in any spiritual practice, interacting with people. I feel full and whole. I’m looking to integrate all of me. And I feel that if I allow myself to be that way, live that way, then I am more able to allow the other person to be that way, too (see Appendix K.5, p. 58).*

Dzieci eschews applause. Dzieci's ritual work demands energy containment - and applause disperses energy.

*Again, this comes from Gurdjieff work. I used to get a lot of energy and I'd spill the energy. I would get so high from workshops and then I would be gone. So, it's about accumulating ... you have to work on the vessel because there are always cracks, but then it's accumulating ... because it can go like that (Matt makes the sound of a lightning bolt) and you're left with an actual negative resource. You've spilt more than you have accumulated. And you end up with less than you had. But if you slow down the process, if it takes a day, if it comes out more slowly, something remains. That's what begins to create change of being. If that energy is allowed to remain a little bit longer (see page 212).*

Dzieci's practice stands in contrast to TAI which encourage applause, because it offers affirmation.

*...Each time a speaker concludes, Gifford and Kathy insist that applause is received. This is an opportunity for the audience to give back some of the energy it has received. It is not only polite to receive, but also nurturing (Jessica, see Appendix K.3, p. 27).*

## **6. The Witness**

*It's being and being seen, it's what the true witness is able to do for the other. It's beyond listening, it's beyond anything we'd call coaching ... it's really the insatiable desire to get the other and then to give the other a chance to see themselves and to go some place new (Kathy Cramer, see Appendix K.3, p. 16 ).*

One may easily regard the actor's relationship with the spectator as the central element of theatre. In paratheatre, however, there is no audience, no outer spectator. Only rarely do Antero Alli's paratheatrical labs result in public performances. At the Workcenter, too, performance is rare. Art as Vehicle is a medium in which there are only doers and no spectators. Nonetheless, in all the work there unfolds a process of witnessing which this section attempts to articulate.

### **On the spectator**

Eugenio Barba regards his directorial work which interfaces him with the spectator as a practice which demands him to "think in a very paradoxical way" (see page 123). There is no such thing as 'the spectator'. Instead there are many individuals, many facets of perception,

many beliefs, many ways of grasping the unfolding drama, which are present at any one performance.

*...this multiple, this plurality of spectators who are really very concrete in their reactions and responses ... obliges me to concentrate on my actions like a meditation. This is what it is like from an auditing point of view. Everything is form. Everything we think, we imagine is always dressed in forms. Words, colours, sounds. [...] The spectator is for me the factor who obliges me to concentrate and discover many new things in what I have already found, he is the decisive factor for exploration... (ibid).*

In his directorial interaction with the spectator, Eugenio is driven by the concern to create a disturbing experience for the spectator. Eugenio likens this disturbance to a *Verfremdungseffekt* which is able to evoke new associations within the spectator.

Eugenio Barba's aim to disturb the spectator and estrange him stands in contrast to the work pursued by the staff of TAI who aim to bring their clients into an unambiguously open relationship with their audiences. The company asserts that in order to be in such authentic relationship with their spectators, performers need to be present with them without judgement or preconception and without the desire to impose something on them.

Dzieci member Rebecca Sokoll describes how compelling it can be for performers to impose intentions upon their audiences. She describes her main challenge in performance work as not giving into thinking about "what the audience needs to see. To convey something, to communicate something. Then the tensions will come from trying to cause what I think needs to be there" (see Appendix K.5, p. 52). Nick Walker of ParaTheatrical ReSearch is similarly wary of producing work which aims to achieve emotional and mental disturbance within an audience and he believes a humble and compassionate approach is very important. "Be true to yourself and trust that it will have the right effect on the right people. I am not arrogant enough to think that I know what effect I should have" (see Appendix K.2, p. 51). Equally, Matt Mitler stresses that performers must not attempt to affect their audiences. "...that would be an ego manifestation. My God, I'm going to change the audience's psychological state, spiritual state - how presumptuous" (see page 209). Ang Gey Pin describes her efforts not to concern herself with the audience and what they might think about her work - but not to block them out either. She likens the process to a mediation, an un-preparing (see page 198).

Still, Eugenio Barba insists that the actor is highly compelled to feel judged by the spectator and react and play to his presence.

*You start trying to tell something to this gaze. If you like it or not. [...] You have performances where the actors play the same structure, the same score - and*

*nevertheless there is something different. Sometimes there are people they really dislike and then you can perceive it - I can because I know because I see them every evening (see page 124).*

Kathy Cramer sheds further light on the dynamics of the witnessing process. She suggest that as a performer,

*...the power in your presence is to see the audience ... so that the audience feels seen. And it just doesn't happen very often anywhere ... that you get that reciprocity. [...] in a very un-self-conscious way I am all about the other. And I take 100% responsibility for what's happening in the relationship (see page 171).*

Kathy and Gifford Booth assert that audiences know when performers are authentic and sincere in their offering and when they are not. They suggest that if both performer and spectator are sincerely committed to the performance relationship, a shift will occur. A performance will have impact if the performer

*...can be vulnerable and integrated [...] and is willing to dive into the unknown or let go of their preconceived ideas and be vulnerable and stay in relationship with the audience and in the unknowing (Gifford, see page 171).*

Similarly Nick Walker asserts that 'real work', particularly work grounded in engagement with vertical sources, will have an effect.

*People are deeply, deeply moved by watching it [...] Because they are having a genuine experience of something real, something vertical - and in a culture that's largely alienated from that ... just being in the same room is amazing (see Appendix K.2, p. 51).*

My co-researchers all emphasise that a performer's vulnerable presence has little to do with critical self-centredness. This, Kathy Cramer and Ang Gey Pin assert, simply creates a huge downward spiral in any performance relationship (for Kathy see page 174, for Gey Pin see page 198). Presence is self-attentiveness without judgement, a discerning investigation of self and other without critical evaluation. During such self-attentiveness the ego is attenuated, whereas in a state of critical evaluation the ego is heightened and the performer is caught in a self cell which cuts him off from his surroundings. Kathy sums up the paradox which seems to lie at the heart of the encounter with the other:

*I need to use myself as an instrument ... I am the message. It's not that it's all about me in the sense of self-consciousness or ego gratification ... it's that I am responsible for who I am in this process called presenting. And most people think it's what they know how to do, it's their subject matter expertise, it's their experience, it's their intellect ... they don't have any idea that who they are ... IS the main event (see page 175).*

### ***On the heat of the witnessing process***

Earlier I referred to Eugenio Barba and Rebecca Sokoll who depicted the actor's experience of the spectator's gaze and of feeling the need to react and adapt to this gaze. All of my co-researchers suggest that the spectator's presence lends a kind of heat to the performance process. They speak of "combustion" (Matt Mitler, see page 209), a time of great "lightness" and "density" (Roberta Carreri, see page 111), an "intense fire" (Matt Mitler, see page 209), even "the gates of hell" (Gifford Booth, see page 175). Nick Walker expresses that he experiences a "density, a concentration that happens to me that helps me source and get into it more deeply" (see Appendix K.2, p. 50).

Whilst being with TAI I witnessed how much courage it takes for each performer to be 'out there' with the audience, for it involves the risk of self-exposure. Being an open and connected performer means dropping one's masks and exposing oneself as a person (see page 175). Similarly Stephen Shelley of Dzieci expresses that performance involves risk which nonetheless can enable the actor to observe himself more deeply and venture further into the unknown.

*...you can allow the audience to assist you in observing how you are. They can provide a kind of heat that enables me to see what's going on, number one, and I also find, number two, that there comes a higher cliff. If it's a rehearsal it might be like the low dive but in a performance it feels like a high dive, given the slightly risky nature of doing these highly intimate things in front of others. I feel that the presence of other people allows me to go further (see Appendix K.5, p. 48).*

Matt Mitler also describes that the presence of an audience raises the stakes for the performer.

*...the audience is the catalyst, the heat, the fire of the Bunsen burner under the test tube. You've been mixing your chemicals and now you build the fire - the audience does that. We're not there for the audience, the audience is there for our combustion, and it is that combustion which can serve the audience (see page 209).*

Matt asserts that Dzieci's performance work often unfolds under particularly intense gaze, for Dzieci often performs in sacred spaces in the presence of clergy who are far more present and attentive than mainstream audiences.

*They're in a state of prayer. So, with that... what that strips out of us is pretty amazing. And in a certain respect there is some similarity to working with patients. If we are working at the bedside of someone who is dying, they don't have any mask. So, if I have a mask I am grotesquely aware of that (ibid).*

Matt suggests that under the right circumstances, a performer's presence with an audience can lead to an initiatic experience, both within the actors and the audience. Such intimate communion, however, does not generally unfold in mainstream performance where, as Matt asserts, audiences are more interested in a change of *state*, not a change of *being* (ibid).

Stephen Shelley concludes that within any performance craft which aims to bring its practitioners to a more vital place being, an authentic encounter with one's audiences has to be at the heart of one's practice. Stephen is critical of private and exclusive performance pursuits, such as the Workcenter's Art as Vehicle, which seems "a bit selfish, isolated in a way that's unserviceable" whereas Dzieci is very much "about going into the world" (see Appendix K.5, p. 48). Stephen also strongly feels that for theatre to be a transformative practice there has to be an audience, "Otherwise you're betraying the art form as a form" (ibid).

How then does the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch which omits the spectator (at least within the framework of its paratheatrical pursuits) fare within this theme? And how does the work of the Workcenter fare within the realm of Art as Vehicle? Superficially, this strong articulation of the need for an audience to galvanise transformative effects in theatre practice, seems to challenge those of my co-researchers who deny the need for an audience. ParaTheatrical ReSearch works without a spectator, and the Workcenter's commitment to Art as Vehicle similarly excludes the external observer. I believe, however, that this question of the role of the audience may be resolved when we recognise that the fundamental need is that for *observation*, which may, or may not, depend on the presence of spectators.

### **On the problem of seeing oneself**

Although there are times when both ParaTheatrical ReSearch and the Workcenter seek the public gaze, more-often-than-not they work in isolation. However, to suggest that paratheatre and Art as Vehicle betray the theatre is to ignore the profound role which the inner witness plays in the work of the actor. For the self-attentiveness of which my co-researchers speak extensively is precisely that: a process of inner witnessing which comes to the fore in both paratheatre and Art as Vehicle. In my diary of The Alchemy Laboratory I noted that Antero's paratheatrical work is fuelled by intense physical work, as well as by "committed engagement with one's own projections" (see page 176) - both of which create another kind of heat. Juxtaposed with the practice of no-form they fuel the fiery gaze which burns within. Nonetheless, in paratheatrical work there is the danger of narcissism and self-indulgence which I will examine further when I come to articulate the pitfalls of Theatre as a Transformative Practice (see page 287).



My co-researchers within Dzieci insist that the only way we can truly see ourselves is through the eyes of others.

*You come to the group to see yourself. Through the group we do work we can't do on our own. If you're not challenged by other people you're not, you don't see yourself in the same way as when you stand in front of someone and you have to deal with them (Yvonne Brechbühler, see Appendix K.5, p. 55).*

*...the most important thing is not sticking to one practice, as much as it is working with a group. It's the work on oneself with others. [...] I'm really suspect of anyone trying to do anything on their own. I mean, I am not going to deny their experience - who am I to say. But I know for myself that I need to work with other people (Matt Mitler, see page 212).*

Dzieci's communal approach is founded on the shared observation that the strength of a group can take the individuals beyond their self-perceived limitations. It can remind them to remain attentive and awake. Whilst the way of the work may be through the eyes of 'others', Yvonne Brechbühler suggests that in moments of profound presence the differentiation between self and other may actually dissolve.

*I find this the most selfish yet selfless moment [...] when I am in myself, centred, which is all about me ... I'm sensing myself ... there is a lot of sensation ... to bring the energy into me ... and free breath ... and allowing myself to be seen and seeing ... [...] that's when I feel most responsive and open and connected to my partner. So, that's why I say, I'm really with myself and really an extension of the other and with the other (see Appendix K.5, p. 56).*

Twila Thompson of TAI expresses a similar understanding: "...maybe it's even that you are so unified with what you're creating that there is no separation (see page 174).

Arlene asserts that the true role of the witness, interior and exterior, is to be present and available, so that the performer's (and spectator's awareness) may transcend the ordinary and enter the mythic, the archetypal, the transpersonal realm. Then theatre can be a shared dreaming space, enabling actors and spectators to tap into "that source ... that creative part ... it's like a renewal of the spirit (see page 97).

Julia Varley of Odin Teatret likens such profound actor-spectator exchange to synchronicities which have occurred in her life: uncanny connections between seemingly unrelated events which lend another level of meaning to her experience. Julia proposes that this shared dreaming space which Arlene describes is not always a pleasant one. The experience can be disturbing and one may not immediately be able to make sense of it. Nonetheless it will have a transformative effect (see page 120).

## On projection

The phenomenon of projection plays a central role in Theatre as a Transformative Practice. Every act of perception involves projection. Every relationship we engage in is shaped by projection. We bestow the 'outside world' with meaning, and most of the time we do this unconsciously. Our perceptions are coloured by our own beliefs and the storylines they give rise to. As Elise DeRosa of TAI puts it,

*We're walking around with all these stories that we tell ourselves. All these beliefs, thoughts, perceptions ... and they're often a fog that gets in the way of our actually seeing what is in front of us, what we're actually working with (see page 186).*

TAI attempts to enable its clients to clear the fog, to burst the bubble and thus enter into a deeper relationship with their audiences. Projections are perceived as a hindrance, as something to be overcome with the help of one's coach.

In contrast, the performers of ParaTheatrical ReSearch work with their projections by pouring them into the ritual space which becomes the container for all visions, ideas, emotions, beliefs. Entering into the space, the performers subject themselves to their psychic material and thus learn more about themselves. John Chung who is a seasoned playback theatre actor contrasts his experiences of ParaTheatrical ReSearch with playback, in which the performers work with and mirror the projections of the tellers (the people who share their stories and who are seated in the audience). From John's perspective, a good playback actor will always hone his/ her "empathy, intuition and discernment and learn to recognize and bracket their own projections" (see Appendix K.2, p. 68). During playback theatre, teller and performers interlock, and the performers enter into a projective trance, becoming mirrors of the teller's life experiences, as well as expressing the underlying archetypal dynamics and patterns which birthed and shaped the teller's experiences.

*The stronger the trance (and projection) of the teller, the lesser the artistic burden on the actors, and vice versa. A successful enactment, therefore, is not just an accurate one, or even an aesthetically pleasing one, but an enactment that also induces a strong, powerful trance, and allows the teller to project powerfully and expansively onto the enactment. The skilled use of physical metaphor, storytelling, myth and archetype are some of the ways to create a rich, aesthetically satisfying container that allows for the complexity of meaning, interpretation and projection that is needed for a successful enactment (ibid).*

Such work with projection is reminiscent of therapeutic approaches, such as Arlene Audergon's Process Work in which therapists consciously engage with transferences and countertransferences. Arlene suggests that it is by means of penetrating the intersection of

the personal with the archetypal that we can identify with another, 'become' another - as John asserts is the case in effective playback theatre. As Arlene might put it, the playback theatre actors are consciously 'dreaming up', that is they are falling into the teller's story, taking on roles within the story and letting the teller's dream figures signal through them. It is through this process that playback theatre actors help the tellers carry the weight of their experiences. Arlene describes similar dynamics in Process Work (see page 98).

Further analysing the use of projection in playback theatre, John proposes eight scenarios which reflect the multiple possibilities for projective interaction in a performance (see Appendix K.2, pp. 68 - 70). Concluding his analysis, John likens playback actors to Tang Dynasty landscape painters who would attune themselves to their environment and allow its energetic qualities to inform their paintings.

*The result was not studied realism, but an energetic imprint that faithfully rendered the manifestation of the same forces that formed the landscape. The dynamics of pressure, flow and energy in movement were translated into patterns of turbulence of ink on paper, echoing the natural energies that shaped trees, rivers, mountains and clouds. Metonymic influences were translated into visual metaphor, using the artist as a channel, conductor, or transducer of the powerful forces of nature" (see Appendix K.2, p. 69).*

Playback theatre actors, too, work with energetic imprints, i.e. the imprints which the tellers leave upon the actors' psychophysiology ... challenging them to become receptive channels and vessels of the shared experience. It is here where playback performance converges with the work of ParaTheatrical ReSearch, for Antero and his colleagues also work with energetic imprints. They become channels of the horizontal and vertical sources with which they interact in their work. Here then lies the difference: In playback performance actors serve the teller, the outer 'other'. In ParaTheatrical ReSearch actors appear to serve themselves, but they are really aiming to serve the inner 'Other' (capital 'O' for the work strives to relate to the vertical, less so the horizontal). At their best, playback theatre and paratheatrical work could converge, mutually serving one another.

We can similarly contrast TAI and ParaTheatrical ReSearch. As we know, Antero and his colleagues pursue their paratheatrical work without audiences; and in the attempt to cultivate an asocial climate, the performers largely keep to themselves, directing their focus inward and relating primarily to the inner 'Other' rather than to one another. This way of working appears to stand in complete contrast to TAI's method, where, as in playback theatre, the actors strive towards a profound focus on the outer 'other', that is the audience and the working colleagues.

Despite their divergence in method both horizontal and vertical approaches can lead to the attenuation of 'I'. Considering my personal experiences of the approaches, I would suggest that whilst the way of ParaTheatrical ReSearch was initially harder to grasp and more difficult to sustain, it eventually led me more deeply into sources beyond egoic grasp and comprehension. In contrast, TAI's method was more accessible and seemed to work more instantaneously, however, it did not lead me away from 'me' quite as deeply. I elaborated on the contrast between the two approaches in my session diary of The Alchemy Laboratory:

*With TAI the focus is on 'the other' and it loosens that grip of self-awareness. Our focus on 'the inner process' in the ritual lab makes it harder for me to become less aware of my self. I spend energy disengaging with my self ... perhaps I need to shift my focus? Open the door yes, let the energy rise up from within ... but then realize that it is beyond the personal and that it is not only fed by my conscious imaginings but that it exists independently from me ... and that I do not need to keep it alive ... I do not need to keep feeding it? But I do need to sustain a connection. I need to become a channel. Currently egoic efforts to sustain stop me from full engagement. I must commit but not try. [...] I need to let the inner channel be open, free, and listen to that which emerges. And I need to do just that with 100% commitment. [...] Working alone ... that channelling process is much harder to sustain (see page 146).*

Such skilful work with 'controlled abandonment' as I have previously described it, really marks the way of ParaTheatrical ReSearch. I experienced that controlled abandonment was far from easy to achieve. Some of the initial encounters with the sources beyond 'me' proved overwhelming, terrifying, sometimes barely controllable (see page 153). Some were marked by true surprises to the ego - a sign to me that the process was really working, and that I was not fantasizing but engaging in real processes of active imagination (see page 152 & Appendix K.2, p. 39). Julia Varley recognises such surprises as an important element in her work.

*...what I enjoy about the actor's work is that by letting your body think you discover. And so it's not that I have decided, 'Oh, I'm going to make a subdued piece', it's more that I am working on the oppositions and I find this, I discover it. And then it's fascinating because you find something that you didn't know, or maybe that your body-mind knew but that you didn't know with your awareness (see page 116).*

Surprises and shocks were not always concerned with new mental insights. In Dzieci's 24-hour marathon I was challenged to perform acrobatic exercises, some of which deeply surprised me and challenged me to abandon myself whilst maintaining high levels of physical control (see page 219). Ultimately it was this sense of controlled abandonment which led me to the most profound states of self-access.

## On the 'other' as mirror

Ang Gey Pin emphasises the importance of the teacher within the work. She describes that she discovered many things about herself, only because she had an outside witness who acted as her mirror and who helped her see her work and herself. Reflecting on her own experience of transmission, Gey Pin suggests that the teacher senses what happens within the student because she or he has gone through similar processes.

*For many years I used to think, 'Wow, how does Thomas know this and that...' It was as if he had some kind of magic. It felt like he could see my inner life ... and I thought that he could see me thinking ... and then I thought, 'How can I face him?' And then ... you see the opening comes from here (Gey Pin points at her heart). If I want to work, what do I need to hide? Why? What? If there is something that was never resolved in my life, it will stay, it will be there and the teacher perceives that (see page 198).*

Kathy and Gifford further propose that any reciprocal relationship between actors and their audiences involves a mirroring of the other. Kathy refers to the research by Bandler and Grinder which led to the development of NLP and which demonstrates that in effective therapy the therapist is 'in synch' with the client, meaning that that he or she mirrors the client's body language (see page 172). At TAI and at the Cramer Institute, the coaches make a conscious attempt to take the lead from the client. They try not to judge, not to pre-empt. Instead they try to be fully present with the other. Kathy Cramer proposes that the identification with the other goes so far that

*...you can start to function for the person. Know what's ready to happen, know what is available. And of course, you can lead with the body. [...] I do it with the face and the eyes. [...] It's not like I can read their minds, I have to be in a sensory way somehow getting them! And I'm also getting it through the voice. What's happening ... what's the congruity ... incongruity ... between what they're saying, how they're saying it, what their face looks like (see page 172).*

Jesse Hathaway who has trained in ceremonial magic suggests that in both the practice of magic and theatre there is "a real strong pull and almost commandment to look at oneself. To treat as many things as possible as mirrors" (see Appendix K.5, p. 61). Jesse also emphasises physical work in theatre can act as a mirror and keep one grounded in the reality of one's capabilities and limitations.

*I started off in a very heady acting programme and realised: I am incredibly good at lying to myself. If there is one thing I am good at, it's building castles in the clouds and living in my own worlds. [...] So, I [...] went to the Experimental Theatre Wing. Because at the end of the day you cannot fake a handstand. You either do it or you don't. And it changed my life (see Appendix K.5, p. 62).*

## 7. Serving the Self?

*We're using theatre as an act of service in the real Christian sense of the word. It also has a humbling effect on how we perform (Matt Mitler, see page 205).*

All my co-researchers express in some way the idea that Theatre as a Transformative Practice involves the service of something greater than the everyday self. Some call it “the spirit within” (Kathy Cramer, see page 177), others speak of “universal will” (Jesse Hathaway, see Appendix K.5, p. 66), of “god” (Nick Walker, see Appendix K.2, p. 48), or of “vertical sources” (Antero Alli, see page 127).

Matt Mitler recalls not feeling comfortable in his younger years to take credit for his creative achievements. He describes having an “unworded awareness” that his work wasn't his (see page 205). Julia Varley simply asserts that “...the performance belongs to itself” (see Appendix K.1, p. 24). Eugenio Barba speaks of facing “the other within you! That part which lives in exile - which is a sort of image I have of the concrete reality I have which is within me, which leads me, prompts me to do certain things” (see page 121). Gifford Booth regards the work as a “way of living. This way of being present in the moment. This way of understanding how we're all interconnected. This way of understanding that something bigger can be expressed through you ... if you just be” (see page 177).

Eugenio Barba speaks of “Karma Yoga” (see page 121). Whilst expressing hesitancy to speak of the actor's work in spiritual terms, he asserts that Odin Teatret follows the path of selfless action which advocates the detachment from the fruits of all deeds.

Kathy Cramer is keen to assert that the work is of this world and accessible all the time. “It's the spirit that permeates every single ounce of energetic force, whatever you want to call it, all the time ... and to me it's not esoteric” (Kathy, see page 177). Kathy suggests that the work can bring individuals and groups back to what is true - and when this happens, the work can take on a numinous quality.

*There is a reverence. There is a moment where people know that this is touching the profound. Now ... that doesn't always happen. [...] BUT it's the stance that this is available and that this IS. [...] - it's an actually lived experience. It's not an idea, not a wish, not a promise. There is a knowing that takes place. In French there are two forms of the word 'to know'. And this one is about becoming familiar ... with this energy that is always available all of the time. This connectedness. So, you are immersed in it and you have the experience. And it's that form of knowing, the experiential knowing rather than the other form of knowing which is more intellectual (ibid).*

## On theatre as ritual

ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci, refer to their work as 'ritual'. They speak of ritual as a tool for 'mining the veins of our common humanity' (Antero Alli, see page 135) and of approaching the Sacred through ritual (e.g. Bob Strock, see Appendix K.5, p. 40). Matt Mitler asserts that throughout its work, Dzieci engages with an intention to make sacred all its actions.

*We 'ritualize' every performance we do. Our work in hospitals, in rehearsals, and in the workshops we lead, all follow ritual forms. [...] This is not saying that we set a form in stone and then follow it slavishly. We return to the form always as if it is for the first time, and the form is forever changing. This is a 'living' ritual, as opposed to a 'dead' ritual. So, it's not that ritual is important in our work, it IS our work (see page 212).*

Dzieci member Jesse Hathaway proposes that effective ritual invokes the essence of 'the thing itself', i.e. the reality of the numinous which lies behind the world of perceptual phenomena (see Appendix K.5, p. 65), by creating access points, gateways which allow us to engage with the deeper sources of life.

*It opens a channel, through which we are vessels, pouring between each other and pouring something that did not originate with either of us. It is something that is gathering through the things that we do (ibid).*

Jesse defines the ultimate aim of ritual as Chrysopoeia (from Greek 'khrusōn' (gold) and 'poiēin' (to make), the alchemical term for the transmutation of base metals into gold which also represents the alchemist's inner work. In summarising the maxim Jesse perfectly sums up the purpose and essential structure of any Dzieci ritual:

*...It's working upon oneself. If that which is above is truly like that which is below, following the great Hermes, it will ... that which is the outer will reflect that which is the inner. And if we surround ourselves with people and symbols of meaning, first of ... of substance and then of meaning, it will transform us. [...] Our development of attention is a huge part of who we are as Dzieci. Through increasing attention on the external we also increase attention on the internal. [...] And it's a sense of evocation. You literally evoke the internal into the external world. And in making it a physical thing, we can work through it. So, perhaps that is psychotherapeutic, perhaps that is ritual, perhaps it is religion. But at any rate, a sense of purpose is the purpose.*

*What you're looking for is ... who is looking ... or what is looking? [...] And that is not a license to exert our will, it's a license to exert Universal Will. And through this exercise in serving oneself and realising that oneself is greater than oneself, capitalisations be damned, but when that realisation comes that my purpose is your purpose in Dzieci [...] the true essence of the action will carry itself out. If I do*

*THIS, something will happen. And I don't know exactly what that is but the essence carries through (see Appendix K.5, pp. 65 - 66).*

Dzieci embraces all religions and draws from many different traditions in its practice. In the main, however, Dzieci attempts to create its own 'Objective Rituals'. The notion of Objective Ritual is, of course, reminiscent of Gurdjieff (Objective Art, see page 69) and Grotowski (Objective Drama, *ibid*), both of whom are central inspirations to Matt Mitler and his ensemble. Dzieci's Objective Rituals are rituals which Matt Mitler and his colleagues have sourced and divorced from traditions, such as the Native American Peyote religion. Matt describes these rituals as distillations of the originals, meaning that their indigenous contexts have been removed and each ritual has been stripped down to its bare essentials, focusing on what makes it an effective tool for inner work. Reflecting on the validity of such a pick-and-mix approach to the world's wisdom traditions, Matt asserts that

*...there is a teaching that is beneath and above all of them and any real master, any spiritual lineage I have ever met with speaks of all practices. And Grotowski was interested in what's the commonality (see page 212).*

In other words, Objective Ritual attempts to dig into the bedrock of ritual. And, as Jesse Hathaway puts it, Objective Ritual is distillation without dogma. Dzieci's ritual frameworks provide an opportunity for direct contact and interaction with practitioners from diverse contemplative traditions - which benefits the ensemble as well as the visitors (see Appendix K.5, p. 64). Nonetheless, there is concern for unashamed appropriation of ritual. Dzieci's enactment of *Fools Mass* left me questioning the meaning of ritual, and what might make it truthful and authentic.

*As I watch the fools, in their disparate ways, cobble together the essential ingredients of the Christian mass - the reading of the scriptures, the sharing of the Gospel, the sermon, the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Holy Communion - I ponder what makes a ritual distinct from a theatrical presentation of such ritual. When is a ritual truly enacted and not merely presented? (Jessica, see Appendix K.5, p. 25).*

Jesse Hathaway, too, is concerned about the appropriation of religious rituals.

*You can never fully separate the forms from the specific spiritual, religious or psychological traditions from which they come from because there is a cosmology that is inherent, or else the ritual will not work. And certainly, something that has come from a completely different cosmology will need to be adapted towards the Western mind, and the American mind at that (see Appendix K.5, p. 67).*

Nonetheless Jesse proposes that Dzieci rituals contain something of essence, and are thus effective in their own right. Drawing upon the Peyote ritual as an example, Jesse highlights that Dzieci's transformative work happens without the ingestion of entheogenic substances,



placing a greater emphasis on the transformative power of intense physical work. Overall, Jesse emphasises that Dzieci rituals must never be compared to or mistaken for the original rituals from which they arose (see Appendix K.5, p. 63).

Questions concerning the meaning and nature of ritual also came to me in my engagement with the Workcenter. As Mario Biagini reflected on my performance of Franny's monologue, he described some of my actions, as well as props as "pseudo spiritual" (see Appendix K.4, p. 23). In my eager attempt to illustrate Franny's spiritual search, I had polluted my score of actions with spiritual signifiers, rather than allowing simple actions to speak for themselves. I quoted Thomas Richards to sum up my error:

*I represented actions, I gave them signs in their stead. I did not really do them. Rather than remembering with my body exactly how I had reacted while falling through the air - refinding all the exact impulses my body (my dreaming-body) had had during the fall, I represented all this with a form, and into this form tried to pour the emotion I had felt in that moment. I invented a form with my mind, intended to represent something the body had actually experienced. Then I tried to execute that form, and suck forth the emotion that had been present in the dream itself. But the body did not have any logical behaviour in which it could believe. I also did not understand that the body might remember by itself. If I let my body do its own work, let it remember its own way of falling, the body might start to trust in the truthfulness of its process, and itself remember the experience of falling. If this were done truthfully enough, the emotion might follow along, as had happened in the dream where there was the reality of the dreaming-body's fall, and then the specific reaction of terror, provoked by what the body was experiencing (ibid).*

It is then perhaps right to conclude that authentic ritual acts, as well as performances, are rooted in real physical, embodied actions, not representations, which are carried out with clear intent, as well as a high degree of attention and awareness. This notion also resonates with TAI, which, however, does not refer to the term 'ritual' to describe its work. As for Dzieci and ParaTheatrical ReSearch, the distillation of ritual relates back to the theme of 'ritual actions versus ritual postures' (see page 144). I would like to propose that Dzieci's idiosyncratic Objective Rituals are a rare combination of distilled forms with authentic impulse work.

Within the domain of scholarly discourse questions remain. Is distilled ritual, as Dzieci, Grotowski and Gurdjieff promote it, as effective as ritual which is culturally embedded? Is an eclectic approach toward ritual in danger of proliferating an uprooted perennialism which does not hold up to scrutiny? It is not for me to judge. I will, however, attempt to explore these questions further when I came to discuss my research results in Chapter 7.

## On art in service of life

Throughout his career, Matt Mitler saw other performers lead a life of imbalance, a life exploited by art. Matt searched for a practice which could serve both his art and his life off-stage.

*People were really not healthy, they were good in their performance but not healthy in their lives. I saw that with some of Grotowski's company, too. This ... this ... this ... something on stage and something else in life. My thing was how to have a practice, an art that served life (see page 205).*

Art in service of life is a central building block of Dzieci. The company often performs in hospitals and hospices. To members of Dzieci, work in service of life means attenuating the ego and developing inner integrity (see page 205) and presence. They assert that such service has little to do with 'wanting to help' others. Nonetheless, their practice can have a healing effect. As Yvonne Brechbühler asserts,

*...we're not going there for them. We're going there for ourselves, we work for, on us, but working on us we do something to the environment, we alter the energy around us. When you work on yourself you alter the energy around you. Going there I have to work a lot on staying present and not being overwhelmed by my emotions. I don't want to go in there with pity, I just want to be present. [...]*

*This was very difficult for me in the beginning. I mean, who am I to go there? What do I have to give? Am I trying to be the saviour? The healer? Or what? What am I trying to do here? But this is my mind racing, I have a very critical, self-critical mind and I go there also to stop these voices. Because when the voices stop, then there just is... there is just presence. And I have something to give and the people give me something and it doesn't matter what it is. It's just connecting, life, yes, we can heal each other (see Appendix K.5, p. 57).*

To Matt Mitler, art in service of life means both developing one's technical craft and serving one's 'inner life'. Matt specifically refers to Gurdjieff who affirmed that one must work on three levels: the physical, the emotional and the intellectual.

*You can have this incredible physical mastery but if there is not something here and here [Matt points to the heart and head, JB] you're like a tree that's grown branches up and off for a mile and eventually they're going to crack or they're going to uproot the tree or the roots will shrivel. Something's going to go wrong (see Appendix K.5, p. 6).*

To Matt, service ultimately means sacrifice.

*What I need to sacrifice is nothing less than myself. My likes and dislikes. My insecurities. My tensions. My habits. Everything in me that can be destroyed must be destroyed. What is called for, ultimately, is a human sacrifice. This is not a metaphysical activity Dzieci is concerned with. This is practical. We approach 'art as service' by initially working with disadvantaged populations in hospitals and other treatment centres. We do not take this work in order to heal (or even help) those in need. It's done to sacrifice our false selves (see page 206).*

### **On possession versus service**

Jesse Hathaway suggests that the attenuation of the daily self may lead to a losing of oneself in the performance or ritual act, in which case one 'becomes' the source which one has tapped into, entering a state of possession (see Appendix K.5, p. 67). He emphasises that the focus ought to rest on 'serving' a source rather than becoming it. This means that, no matter how vital the connection to the source, the double-arrow of attention remains active, enabling the practitioner to stay aware whilst becoming deeply involved in the enactment of the source. The result is a deeper connection to one's inner observer, as well as a more effective containment of the source expressed.

The members of ParaTheatrical ReSearch also speak of the difference between *becoming* and *serving* a source. They express that if one becomes a source one becomes an unconscious conduit, fully charged and immersed. On the other hand, if one serves a source one becomes a vessel, less charged and more conscious and in control of expressing and articulating that particular energy (see page 143). Such descriptions are reminiscent of Arlene Audergon's depiction of 'snorkelling', that is simultaneous presence and immersive loss of self in performance.

Most members of ParaTheatrical ReSearch regard the service of a source as preferable to 'becoming' the source. JoJo Razor, however, highlights the cathartic value in 'becoming' a source. She feels that the service of a source can be too detached and dissociative. JoJo asserts that she cannot serve a source until she has fully cycled through immersing herself in that source by merging with it. She suggests that her understanding of this issue may be rooted in a male-female bias, with the males in the group striving for service of a source whilst remaining emotionally detached and the females engaging in service via emotional expression. Comparing her work in ParaTheatrical ReSearch to her experiences in therapy, JoJo further asserts,

*...you go through the emotional first to get the gold nugget. And you express it, totally express it. Why would I want to shut it down? But they'd say 'You're just*

*not far enough along yet.’ And I think well, there must be some stuff that must still be cleaned out yet (see Appendix K.2, p. 57).*

The issue of catharsis also arises within the work of TAI. On the last day of The Creative Dynamic the workshop participants were asked to engage in a sequence of exercises, inviting explosive emotional expression (see Appendix K.3, p. 42 - 44). I perceived these cathartic exercises as useful and meaningful for some participants and more forced for others and I asked myself what they could achieve within the brevity of the workshop. Later, whilst highlighting the powerful effect of such exercises, Twila Thompson agreed that they can also be “dangerous if not followed up by continual practice. It’s a little like doing therapy in a weekend. We’re not therapists, that’s not our focus, nor are we qualified” (see Appendix K.3, p. 44). Twila further suggested that cathartic work may be redundant within The Creative Dynamic which is really concerned with the exploration and articulation of the participants’ personal desires and vision, rather than the release of negative emotions.

### **On the service of the Work**

The notion of cathartic release connects back to the central aim of my co-researchers’ practices. As highlighted earlier, ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci are particularly focused on pursuing transpersonal, or spiritual, work which is oriented toward the service of Source, the service of the Work, rather than the service of the self. Such, I believe, would be Antero’s answer to JoJo’s suggestions on emotional catharsis. ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci do not pursue therapy. Matt further emphasises,

*The aim is that whatever you have in the moment is what you work with. [...] You’re not there to work on what you have ... you’re there to take what you have and put it into the work. So, there is a different orientation. One is ... the arrow points to me. My needs, my wants, my imbalances. And the other is that those qualities and needs and wants are put towards a service (see page 206).*

I also encountered the notion of such service of the Work in my encounters with Ang Gey Pin and the Workcenter. Whilst the idea was not overtly articulated, I sensed a profound commitment of the practitioner to his work. At the Workcenter I had made the mistake of ‘pumping’ my emotions for which I had been severely criticised by Mario (see Appendix K.4, p. 22). Reflecting on Gey Pin’s approach I further noted that...

*She had pushed me, shouted at me, relentlessly, pulling my hair, correcting my spine and posture, admonishing me when my attention wandered from the service of the song to something I thought it needed. It needed nothing. Nothing but my service, my utter attention to every detail, every subtle note as it unfolded in the space around, my complete surrender to its life which was also mine - but*

*not the ego's life, driven by needs and desires. I was free in those moments ... when the grip of the ego subsided and Jessica could be more fully present. And I knew that this was the work, something of the core of the work on the self (see Appendix K.5, p. 29).*

The aim of the work was to serve the song, to serve the performance score - and not to indulge in emotional catharsis.

### **On being a vessel of God**

Earlier I highlighted that some of my co-researchers speak of surrender to and service of a Divine or Universal Will. Jesse Hathaway believes that we each have the propensity to become as God and that we must live in accord with Universal Will (see Appendix K.5, p. 66). Similarly, Nick Walker expresses that he attempts to live his life in service of God's will (see Appendix K.2, p. 48). Within ParaTheatrical ReSearch Nick particularly values the combination of no-form practice with the service of sources. He acknowledges that no-form is rooted in Zen Buddhism but like Antero highlights that it is an immediate precursor to centred, grounded and inspired action rather than a state of Samadhi. Nick feels that ParaTheatrical ReSearch teaches the principles of Zen in a better way in the long run.

*I don't know, better - maybe that's not the right word. Obviously, enlightened Zen masters ... they have it, you know, but ... I like how the paratheatrical teaches that one doesn't just explore being nothing, but that one explores service (ibid).*

For Nick, Antero Alli's paratheatre is ultimately a practice of service, helping him to manifest his innate potential which he perceives as an expression of God. In terms of paratheatrical nomenclature, Nick explains that it is all about tapping into vertical sources and bringing them into horizontal interaction. "The paratheatrical work teaches me how to live" (see Appendix K.2, p. 48).

### **Therapy versus Spiritual Practice?**

Theatre as a Transformative Practice may unfold in diverse settings, as my selection of co-researchers demonstrates. Whilst the circumstances of the work may be very different, the practices may seem to converge in terms of purpose. Put simply and quaintly, all the practices explored may seem to revolve around a work on the self, with a drive to heighten self-access and to enable the practitioner to manifest more of his or her innate potential. My encounters

with my co-researchers show, however, that there are significant, yet subtle differentiations in terms of the aims of the work.

As I have shown, most of my co-researchers do not hesitate to suggest that their practice has therapeutic qualities (whilst only Arlene Audergon can claim to follow a recognised school of therapy). Most of my co-researchers also strongly relate to the idea that their work has a spiritual dimension. However, as has become apparent throughout the composite depiction, one must make a clear distinction between 'theatre as therapy' and 'theatre as spiritual practice'. In this subsection I will highlight the central dividing factors between the two fields, whilst also emphasising that some of my co-researchers sit in other frameworks altogether because they do not pursue their work as a therapy, or as a spiritual practice.

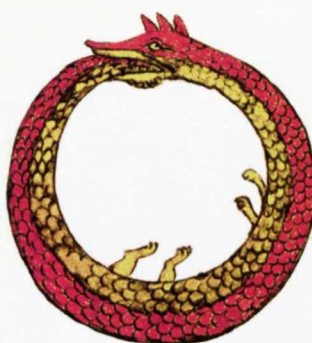
**A first differentiation between theatre as therapy and theatre as spiritual practice seems to arise when we ask whom the work aims to serve.** However, as we will see, this question is really not as straightforward as it may seem. Within ParaTheatrical ReSearch Antero Alli recognizes that his collaborators may access the work for different reasons: some may want to become better performers, some may seek a greater self-understanding and may grapple much with their own psychological baggage (see page 129, also for examples of 'personal processing' see Nick Walker, Appendix K.2, pp. 43 - 45, and JoJo Razor, Appendix K.2, pp. 57 - 58). Nonetheless, the overriding purpose of the work is the service of Vertical Source. Similarly, in Dzieci the work is oriented towards a service of 'the higher' rather than a service of personal needs and imbalances. As such, by serving 'the Other' and not the self, both Dzieci and ParaTheatrical ReSearch pursue what may be conceived of as transpersonal, or spiritual, work. And indeed, both Antero and Matt are keen to set their practice apart from psychotherapeutic ventures which they regard as focusing on a service of the self (for ParaTheatrical ReSearch see page 129, for Dzieci see page 206 & Appendix K.5, p. 59).

However, things are not as clear cut as they may seem. We may attempt to contrast ParaTheatrical ReSearch and Dzieci with Arlene Audergon's work which is clearly a form of therapy. Yet within Process Work what may seem like a service of the self is really a pathway for engagement with collective, archetypal material - which to the egoic self is wholly other. Indeed, Arlene emphasises that it is the work on the most personal issues and imbalances which can bring a person into contact with that which is most universal and transpersonal (see page 95). Or, as John Chung puts it, exploring the contrasting notions of the 'vertical' and 'horizontal'

Vertical is put forth in opposition or in contrast to horizontal - but if we really think about 'source', it's neither vertical nor horizontal, neither outward nor inward, neither backwards, forwards, sideways, forwards, upside down, neither in the future or in the past. It's here right now, always has been, in the actuality

of our being, our fully connected presence, it just is, has been, always will be, and if you needed to place it in an orientation, I'm not so sure it would make sense to place or speak of that which transcends space, time and conception in three dimensional coordinates, or to speak of the non-local, nondual in terms of a geometric orientation or topographical differentiation (see Appendix K.2, p. 72).

The question then becomes a larger and more complex one, around which there is fierce scholarly debate, and for which there is perhaps no answer. Does the 'other' which Arlene's patients encounter in their work equal the 'Other' whom Antero, Matt and their colleagues aim to serve? Does the transpersonal equal the Transcendent? If Dzieci's Jesse Hathaway asserts that "each of us has the propensity to become as God ... or one with God, in whatever sense we use that word" (see Appendix K.5, p. 66), do Arlene's, Antero's and Matt's endeavours not ultimately point towards the same end? May the only difference between them not simply be the different focus of attention and intention, one arrow pointing toward the self, another arrow pointing towards the other ... and yet no matter in which direction one progresses, one will meet the other in the end?



"The Ouroboros" by Theodoros Pelecanos, in Synosius (1478).

In answer to my original question I may thus suggest that within spiritual practice the aim of the work is to serve the work and through the work ... the other - whilst in therapy the aim of the work is to serve the self. As members of Dzieci consistently assert,

*...anyone can leave the group to have a fit, to scream, to cry, but no one is allowed to go out to help them, comfort them. If they do that within the context of the work, then we work with it, but we still don't comfort them. It's all about ... whatever is really happening ... always putting it into the work, putting it into the work, into the work ... not that that's easy to do - people always resist it. But it's just about the work (Matt Mitler, see page 206).*

There are several other factors which contribute to the distinction between theatre as spiritual practice and theatre as therapy. I have already touched upon them in other parts of the composite depiction and I will thus only briefly reiterate them here.

**One central factor revolves around the actor's response-ability.** When exploring 'responsibility as response-ability' (see page 227) I highlighted a major axis of differentiation between approaches with an inclusive orientation (TAI, Arlene Audergon) and approaches with an exclusive orientation (Workcenter, Ang Gey Pin, ParaTheatrical ReSearch, Odin Teatret). I suggested that inclusive approaches tend to place equal responsibility for the unfolding of the inner work on the facilitator (the therapist, the coach) and the client of the work, whilst exclusive approaches demand that the individual practitioner take full responsibility for his/her inner processes. I would like to suggest that theatre as therapy is predominantly an inclusive approach, whilst theatre as spiritual practice sits at the exclusive end of the spectrum.

**A related factor is concerned with the conduct in the workroom and with the relationship fostered between the practitioner and his director, guide, or therapist.** Within inclusive approaches what is known as 'unconditional positive regard' is commonplace (for TAI see page 180). Within exclusive approaches, on the other hand, the conduct of the guide toward the practitioner may seem emotionally detached (e.g. Antero's 'asocial intent', see page 131), cold, demanding, even relentless (see page 192 for Gey Pin, and Appendix K.4, p. 19 for the Workcenter). A relentless attitude of the guide or director, may, however be of service to the individual. As Julia Varley asserts, "of course you can live a much more comfortable life if you want to but if you want to do this job, then do it as best as you can - and then it's very useful to have someone who is very demanding" (see Appendix K.1, p. 24). The demanding director brings out the best from his actors. Furthermore, as highlighted in the 'conditions of transformation', rigour, challenge and discomfort may help the individual to engage more deeply and profoundly with his/her work. Within inclusive approaches the attitude of the therapist, coach or workshop facilitator must be more tempered. It must match the client's capacity for self-insight and responsibility. I highlighted this in my depiction of the Workcenter, contrasting its highly demanding path with that of the theatre practitioner who works in community settings, theatre-in-education, conflict resolution, or therapy (see Appendix K.4, p. 19).

**A final factor in the distinction between theatre as therapy and theatre as spiritual practice is brought to light by Antero. It concerns the phenomenon of projection.** Comparing paratheatrical rituals to therapy, Antero explains that projection is utilised in different ways:

*Often in psychotherapy the advancement of insight and progress involves some kind of transference phenomena between the psychotherapist and the patient.*



*So, that's transference of internal dynamics onto the other person so you can work them out that way. In this work that transference phenomenon is utilised but it's not onto me ... I'm not the psychotherapist. It's the same process of transference or projection of psychic content ... but instead of a person it's projected onto the space before a person that has been designated by a boundary or a circle. And then the person steps into their own projections. To subject themselves to those projections. And by subjecting yourself to your own projections over and over and over again you come to learn a couple of things. 'These are my projections!' and 'This is what it feels like ... and here's what I can learn about myself (see page 129).*

Within Theatre as a Transformative Practice the cleansing of perception through expressive work with projection differs according to context. In my review of the literature I mentioned that psychodrama makes overt use of projection by letting participants become co-actors, or transference figures, in the drama of a protagonist. Similar processes of projection can unfold in dramatherapy, however, many dramatherapists prefer to emphasise the use of dramatic structure and playspace as containers for projection. I also made the point that in theatre as performance craft, there is no therapist but only a director who gives feedback which focuses on the montage of a performance or the execution of technique, whilst the actor is left to project (unconsciously) onto the dramatic structure, the performance space and colleagues. As such, theatre as performance craft does not overtly offer opportunity for work on the self.

I will now add that in theatre as spiritual practice work with projection may be a hybrid of therapeutic and performance craft approaches, as we have seen in ParaTheatrical ReSearch. Here the actor may project onto the dramatic structure and performance space, as well as onto his co-workers and thus expose himself and work through the knots which bind him, doing so with inner awareness, and knowing that his director (and also co-workers) will act as mirror to hold him to account. Overall, in theatre as spiritual practice the actor is responsible for witnessing, negotiating and containing his own process whilst in theatre as therapy the therapist tends to act as the primary witness and container.

## **8. Dangers and pitfalls**

My co-researchers highlight that the inner work of the actor entails risk. There are pitfalls and dangers along the way. I have already highlighted issues, such as an individual's capacity for response-ability, or lack thereof, which can lead to volatile circumstances (see e.g. Nick Walker's depiction, Appendix K.2, pp. 51 - 52). Particularly dangerous can be such practices which involve entering into Altered States of Consciousness and which can rapidly expose the practitioner to unconscious material.

Antero Alli lists a number of pitfalls which he has encountered within ParaTheatrical ReSearch over the years, from psychic irritation, to shock, to ego-inflation, to “the overwhelming force of too much information, novelty and grace. Yes, even grace can be an impediment” (see page 140). These pitfalls are described in depth in the depiction of ParaTheatrical ReSearch (see Appendix K.2, pp. 17 - 20), I shall therefore refer to them here only briefly.

**Irritation:** Antero’s rituals involve rigorous physical work which generates a lot of heat in the body and activates and sensitises the nervous system. Such activation can lead to sensory overload and irritation which in turn may trigger emotional and physical rawness, numbness, a shut-down of the system. Antero proposes that irritation may be neutralised through a grounding of the body, as well as through no-form which aids the process of dis-identification from source relations and which helps restoring equilibrium within the body-mind. Antero also proposes that journaling or drawing can help restore inner balance, helping the individual make sense of what has been experienced. JoJo Razor echoes Antero’s suggestion, expressing regret that there weren’t more opportunities for drawing in The Alchemy Laboratory, for drawings have particularly helped her to retain and integrate the experience of the rituals into her daily life (see Appendix K.2, p. 61).

**Shock:** Any ritual may lead to an eruption of and encounter with one’s shadow. As elucidated earlier, encounters with difficult psychic material form an important aspect of the work within ParaTheatrical ReSearch, and also Dzieci, and the work of Arlene Audergon, rendering the ego more flexible, more humble, more integrated. However, such encounters, if utterly unexpected may also lead to shock, panic and deep levels of stress and anxiety within the individual. I experienced such distress in session five of The Alchemy Laboratory (see page 153). Antero’s descriptions resonate with Carl Jung’s understanding that the process of active imagination can lead to the spontaneous eruption of repressed contents which can overpower the conscious mind, triggering states of possession, even genuine psychotic intervals (see page 81). Individuals may experience shocks even if they do not engage in physically exhausting or mind-altering practices. At TAI Gifford recalls an example of a client who fainted during the Power and Presence workshop because the task that she had been given didn’t fit into her paradigm (see page 176) and she could not make sense of it.

**Ego-inflation:** Antero Alli further proposes that following ritual immersion the ego can over-identify with one particular energy accessed, resulting in positive or negative inflation. Antero suggests that both states are delusional. Nonetheless he believes that ego-inflation may be a valid step in the initial interaction with archetypal forces, for it enables us to deeply identify with a source, by becoming one with it. “Delusion sets in when we start taking ourselves too seriously by not releasing our attachment to these forces after the ritual is over” (see

Appendix K.2, p. 19). Nick Walker describes one such case of ego-inflation, or 'vertical intoxication' as he calls it, in his depictions of paratheatrical work (see Appendix K.2, pp. 51 - 52). Both Antero and Nick suggest that the main way to avoid inflation is to practice no-form which promotes detachment and inner awareness.

**Self-indulgence:** Matt Mitler highlights the issue of over-identification with the inner orientation and the desire to express 'the within' as a tendency towards self-indulgence. Countless actors perform to gratify their egos. Matt proposes that work with closed eyes can foster self-indulgence, for it helps people withdraw from the outer world.

When working with Grotowski, Matt noticed how much importance was placed on eye contact in the work sessions. In Dzieci, the performers work with eye-contact long before Matt allows them to act in darkness or with their backs turned to one another. We may relate Matt's understanding to Carl Jung's differentiation between fantasy and active imagination, the former of which is self-indulgent, plays with conscious expectation and does not bring new insight (see page 81).

**Grace as impediment:** Antero suggests that grace, too, can act as an impediment in ritual work.

*When the grace resulting from technical refinement overwhelms spontaneity, the life force is temporarily constrained and oppressed. When an over-attachment to a grand aesthetic ideal results in imposing that vision onto the world and others, grace can become tyranny. [...] We trip over grace when it overwhelms our integrity. As we increase our capacity to absorb and hold more power, energy and freedom we must look for ways to circulate this grace, lest it leave us bloated and gorged on too much of a good thing (see Appendix K.2, p. 19).*

**Forced catharsis:** My encounters with the Workcenter brought to light the trap of forcing or 'pumping' one's emotions, triggering an inorganic, and potentially false catharsis. Whilst presenting an acting proposition to the group, I had flooded my performance with anxieties and frustrations which did not stem from the proposition but which were rooted in my past interactions with Workcenter staff.

*And so Jessica as Franny entered the work space ... as if on steroids. I was so utterly wrapped up in my trying to impress my audience ... that I used all of Jessica's performance anxiety and frustration to fill Franny's actions with the most epic emotions ... instead of simply following my score of actions, living the questions, and keeping my performance clean and subtle. I forced Franny to shout, cry and pour chicken soup all over her body [...] Later Mario severely attacked my performance. He strongly criticised my pumping of emotions which, he expressed, blocked all possibilities of my finding subtleties in the text and score of actions. He asserted that I had exaggerated Franny's crisis, turning it into*

*something highly pathological. He called my performance horribly phoney and suspect. Secondly, Mario asserted that I had made the fundamental error of approaching the performance from a place of knowing and of assumed self-importance which 'starts everything on the wrong foot' (see Appendix K.4, p. 22).*

My encounter with the Workcenter, as well as with Gey Pin, reminded me that the actor must simply follow his actions and let them unfold - instead of attempting to take the lead. As Jung would put it, the true sign of active imagination is that one follows, not leads (or else one is in the realm of fantasy) ... as articulated in the theme of 'movement and repose.' As Grotowski has put it, the key to the actor's craft is that "emotions are independent of the will" (ibid).

Forced catharsis may not remain within the realm of conscious fantasy but instead it may trigger deeply disturbing material for which the individual is not prepared, leading to irritation or shock as Antero describes it. As highlighted earlier, the issue of forced catharsis also arose in my encounters with TAI where Twila Thompson acknowledges the danger of catharsis which is not properly contained, supported and followed up (see page 282).

## 9. Glimpses of transformation

### Stages of the Work

After three decades of investigation, Antero Alli has identified three recurring and overlapping phases which seem to structure the paratheatrical work of the collective (see page 151). These are **access** (involving the cultivation of inner receptivity and immersion in sources beyond the self), **service** (i.e. controlled abandonment to the sources encountered) and **articulation** (which tempers spontaneity with precision, resulting in forms which may be suitable for public performance). Antero's depiction resonates with the stages of active imagination as proposed by a number of Jungian authors (e.g. see Chodorow, 1997, p.11).

Reflecting on the inner workings of his paratheatre, Antero also makes reference to some of the phases of transformation which are depicted in alchemical treatises, notably pointing to the **nigredo** (see Appendix K.2, pp. 19 - 20), the first stage of the Magnum Opus, the alchemist's Great Work which Carl Jung has interpreted as a proto-pathway towards individuation. The nigredo is the phase of decomposition, depression and disintegration, in which the ego is confronted with a confusion of conscious and unconscious contents of the mind. The nigredo is said to usher in the following stages of the Work, notably the **albedo** or whitening, which marks the dawning of new insight through the union of opposites. Some alchemical treatises describe four, some seven, others twelve stages of transformation.

Tracking my own experiences in The Alchemy Laboratory, I described traversing through several phases of engagement (see page 152) which resonated with the alchemical path, from egoic *enchantment* (in which I did not enter raw territory), to *crisis* (a state of emergency which I experienced as extremely unsettling and upsetting but which became the gateway to deeper self-access), to *confusion* (i.e. the beginning fusion of opposites which to me felt much like an experiential 'soup'), to *service* (which to me involved laying bare the 'unconscious knots' I was made of, surrendering whatever emerged and allowing myself to 'fall apart' and to live the questions, the mystery, rather than to seek answers). I noticed that the phases were to some degree progressive but also overlapping, and cyclical. Moving from confusion to service, back to confusion, to service and back into crisis, I dialogued with the one I call 'the Other' who advised me that the journey would be aided by continual practice, by repetition, by commitment and by 'lighting the lamp', that is by increasing consciousness (see Appendix K.2, p. 35). As I was learning to serve the sources I encountered within, individual themes and images expanded, and a web of metaphors and allegories emerged, revealing more of my deeper beliefs and values which seemed to underpin the storylines that shape my life. I was compelled to examine these beliefs and their roots and to confront my lack of grounding in continual practice, as artist and as adept. And I realised that the revitalisation of my being and the realisation of my personal potential depended on nothing less than my faithful surrender to and service of the Other, the one whom we may call by any number of names, should we feel the need to classify.

### **Commitment to continual practice**

Whilst my encounters with ParaTheatrical ReSearch gave me the deepest insight into potential stages of transformation, some similar themes emerged in my engagement with my other co-researchers. The value of long-term commitment to a practice was strongly apparent in the actors of Odin Teatret. Both Roberta Carreri and Julia Varley depicted their evolution as artists and persons. Roberta spoke of her transformation as the 'death and rebirth of a phoenix' (see pages 107 - 110) and a growth in 'seasons' (see pages 108 - 111), moving from *initiation* (concerned with achieving embodied presence), to a *de-automatisation* (i.e. the challenge to find ways of "crashing" through one's own "clichés" which accumulate in one's work (see page 108), and here Roberta speaks of her fictive characters 'clinging to her like parasites' (see page 110), to *teaching and articulation* (enabling her to integrate her experiences more fully into conscious awareness (see page 108).

Within Dzieci, Jesse Hathaway speaks of achieving 'continuity through practice'. Before Dzieci, Jesse had profound experiences, however,

*...there was no through-line. There was like a bunch of scenes without continuity. [...] With Dzieci ... I have to do it. I have to be in my body, I am out of my head, because there is no other way to do it (see Appendix K.5, p. 62).*

Dzieci challenges Jesse to connect with his body, to remain grounded and fully present. It has been with the help of Dzieci that Jesse has begun to find his own ground and through-line.

*...when I joined [...] it was brilliant moments of inspiration and then ... dead ... and then a brilliant moment of inspiration - but I couldn't repeat it, I couldn't necessarily recreate all the things that led to that moment. It was as if I was just letting myself be possessed by some spirit. It was there and then it was not. [...] I think Dzieci has allowed me revelation through coming back to a sense of gravity and stillness (see Appendix K.5, p. 63).*

The staff of TAI also believe that deep changes in the person are achieved through continual practice (see page 167). Clients of TAI often stay in relationship with the company for several years. TAI regularly receive feedback from their clients that their interventions trigger not only personal but deep organisational changes. When the creative practice of an individual client deepens it becomes embodied and habitual. Individual behaviour patterns change and the individual becomes a natural “advocate of change” (Twila Thompson, see page 168), subtly influencing and transforming the behaviour patterns of his/her colleagues.

## **Impact**

Whilst it was not my aim within this research to map and measure the impact of Theatre as a Transformative Practice but rather to illuminate the underlying dynamics at work, some of my co-researchers indicated to me how their practice has changed them as persons and as professionals. In the case of TAI, they spoke of the changes they had noticed within their clients.

Rebecca Sokoll (see Appendix K.5, p. 50) and Jesse Hathaway regard Dzieci as the central component of their spiritual path. Jesse elucidates that

*Dzieci functions as a school, it functions as my grounding, it functions as my covenant, it functions as my church and it supplements my actual religious life as well. And since my joining Dzieci things have become more settled. I have become less ... more present and less ... something that I can't describe. I am grounded here. That's why I'm here (see Appendix K.5, p. 62).*

Matt Mitler and Yvonne Brechbühler (see Appendix K.5, p. 59) assert that Dzieci makes a difference to the lives of its members. Matt emphasises that

*I think they have healthier, creative lives. They're not running off to do dinner theatre because they need to perform so badly that they take some horrible job like that. They're getting their PhDs in psychology, they're getting involved in art therapy, music therapy. They're doing work of substance, not work to feed an ego. That makes me really happy (Matt, see page 207).*

Matt has also noticed that the lives of Dzieci members seem more stable than that of the average actor.

*...most of the Dziecis have a significant other, spouse, and kids, two kids even. They have families, jobs, a life of a certain balance. The gravity is there (ibid).*

Within ParaTheatrical ReSearch it is JoJo Razor who is most expressive about the transformative value of the work. She describes that the work has opened up a whole new world to her (see Appendix K.2, p. 53) and that it has given her a sense of purpose and empowerment (see Appendix K.2, pp. 53 - 54). Through paratheatrical work she has been able to engage in much personal processing (Appendix K.2, pp. 57 - 58) and she has been able to move forward in her life, changing jobs and developing her artistic career (see Appendix K.2, p. 54). JoJo expressed great appreciation towards Antero and his partner Sylvi who helped her “find the keys to my own soul” (see Appendix K.2, p. 62).

### **On my personal journey**

Throughout this composite depiction I have focused extensively on the diverse perspectives of my co-researchers who have profoundly shaped this research project. Whilst depicting the dynamics of Theatre as a Transformative Practice I have not lost sight of the personal nature of the project. This PhD research has been my vehicle which has carried me along unknown currents, moving me into an ever closer relationship with the ocean, the vast collective expanse of human experience which is both wholly other and mine ... and which has driven, informed and transformed my quest. Seven years ago, in 2004, I wondered what the dynamics of Theatre as a Transformative Practice might be. I was hungry for answers. Today, as I begin to articulate answers, I love ambiguity and I prefer living the questions.

Throughout my PhD, the periods of immersion in my topic of research varied greatly. Sometimes I planned my encounters with the others, sometimes opportunities unfolded and I

followed. No matter how much time I spent with my co-researchers, two days or three months, our meetings always challenged me, surprised and enriched me. As I engaged with each person and each practice, my sincere attempts to track and articulate what was so generously shared with me profoundly reflected my own response-ability, that is my capacity for openness, integrity, congruence and unmediated perception. I feel that I have grown in my encounters with my co-researchers. Meeting them, I was not always able to respond graciously to the challenges they lay before me, but I hope that, following sustained periods of incubation and explication, I have succeeded in seeing them - and myself - more clearly.

In 2004 I began my journey from a place of intellectual curiosity, as well as a deep, embodied unrest which I did not really understand. I had questions and I wanted answers. For one and a half years I read literature and sought co-researchers in whose work I could become immersed, remaining deeply caught within my intellect and becoming progressively frustrated, for no doors seemed to be opening. However, there was only ever one door which did not open. In those early years I was fixated on the idea that I needed to work with the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards to be successful in my quest. However, as Grotowski's last bastion remained unassailable other pathways opened ... leading me to TAI, ParaTheatrical ReSearch, Arlene Audergon, Dzieci, Ang Gey Pin and at long last I was also granted a glimpse of the Workcenter.

It was Antero Alli's work which first shifted my journey from an intellectual search to an embodied quest. In The Alchemy Laboratory I remembered the value of self surrender and I practiced letting myself fall and fall apart.

*My falling apart became my turning point. Contact points with sources were hatching all over my body, revealing small moments of insight, the deeper I let myself fall into the work. Whilst I had thus far intellectually appreciated the idea of 'serving a source' ... I had been slow to relinquish control due to my high levels of self-investment. I had fostered a long belief in the transformational value of theatre work. I had travelled half way around the world to find proof for my beliefs. I had wanted to draw together tools, develop a system, assemble the ultimate transformational theatre practice which would change the lives of people and make a difference to the world! - And here I was. Falling apart and realising that I had been driven by my internal need for a spiritual practice which would foster growth and transformation within ... me. And that I had thus far not really paid attention to what was stirring within. Gradually I entered the time of service (see pages 154 - 157).*

Following The Alchemy Laboratory, the notion of service became my overriding challenge. As Gifford Booth once expressed to me, "I'm sure this PhD has written you - as opposed to you writing it. It has told you what it wants" (see page 183). How true, Gifford, how true! Listening to 'what it wanted' was the challenge, for it wanted me to hear that towards which I had



become deaf. It wanted me to see that towards which I had become blind. My blind spots were not only the knots that bound me, my psychological shadows, but my doubt and lack of faith in the unfolding path. Prior to commencing the PhD I had been a successful artist with a flourishing career - and yet I had felt unsatisfied. Many fortune opportunities had come my way and I had a real sense of being able to attract that which was essential for my life journey - and yet I was somewhat unfulfilled and adrift. I wanted life to go my way - but I did not know what my way really was, for I was skilled and able and interested in so many things: creative writing, lecturing, physical theatre, conflict resolution, acting, directing, project management, arts & health, psychology, consciousness studies, quantum physics, alchemy, mysticism! I would have loved a fusion of them all. And so I followed all paths and none. I profoundly believed in my innate abilities and potential and yet I found myself engaged in a patchwork of projects, my vision corroded, my energies drained, my passions dulled by community arts work which did not feed my soul but which seemed to feed on me instead.

My PhD became my vehicle for a deep self-search. Beginning with ParaTheatrical ReSearch, my encounters with my co-researchers renewed and revitalised my sense of commitment to my own path as artist and as person. I became an archaeologist of the soul, digging through the rock, mining for gold. Towards the end of The Alchemy Laboratory I experienced a vivid ritual reverie which revolved around the alchemical process of transmuting base material into gold. As the ritual commenced I was compelled to search for gold, digging and mining, and having to give away the little I found. Hesitant at first I soon realised that the more I gave away the more gold would arrive. I found myself rich beyond measure. Moreover, as the ritual progressed the images deepened. It was then that I realised that I should not mine for gold but that I should instead create it, for such was my power. I could transmute dirt into gold.

*From now on I shall be the alchemist I was always meant to be. To turn dirt to gold. To serve the higher forces of the universe. To serve my Self. And in this service I shall serve others ... in the service of the Great Other (see Appendix K.2, p. 40).*

My encounters with my co-researchers unfolded. Profoundly challenging as they were, they began to revitalise my sense of awe in the sources beyond me and my desire to swim in the unknown current and to follow wherever they should lead me. Where in 2003 I had feared the ocean and its depths, this time I began to dive with excitement, eyes wide open.

Sometimes there was profound challenge and pain. The process of surrender to practices as diverse as the work of TAI and Ang Gey Pin brought much ambiguity, many contradictions which at times felt overwhelming, disparate, insoluble. I was tempted to omit some of my co-researchers from the composite depiction, denying that I had ever crossed their paths at all.

But my deepening faith and sense of commitment to the path pulled me along. I walked the path of paradox.

Distractions were also aplenty. Whilst pursuing my PhD part time I was continuing with my freelance work, teaching and lecturing at Liverpool John Moores University, running theatre workshops, managing Creative Alternatives. And despite my sense of commitment I was becoming progressively frazzled and fragmented. Whenever I travelled to join my co-researchers abroad I felt elated and on course. Whenever I returned home I felt bereft and I yearned for a continuity of practice. From the autumn of 2006 I made repeated attempts to integrate my new experiences into my creative practice, by leading workshops and laboratories in professional performance contexts and community contexts, in which I revisited aspects of my co-researchers' work. The facilitation of these workshops placed me in the role of teacher and guide and undoubtedly enabled me to gain a greater insight into the dynamics of the work. One three-month laboratory which I facilitated with young performing artists in Liverpool provided particularly encouraging glimpses of the potency of the work. However, I also knew that I still needed to follow rather than lead the work for I had much to learn. As I led by necessity rather than choice I yearned to return to Italy, Denmark and the United States to continue my own training.

By 2007 a new current emerged from the depths. In our repeated encounters I had noticed that many of my co-researchers were engaged in martial arts which informed their performance practices. Gey Pin Ang was immersed in the study of Tai Chi. Nick Walker of ParaTheatrical ReSearch was a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan in Aikido. Jesse Hathaway of Dzieci had also trained in Aikido. Grotowski himself had experimented with yoga and numerous other practices. At the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw I encountered a thriving group of performers who practiced Kalarippayattu, an Indian martial art which had given rise to the Kathakali dance drama which Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba had admired so much in their early days. One day when I returned home from one of my journeys abroad I thought to open my eyes as to what practice would be available to me in the Northwest of England. I was particularly attracted to Aikido and I was utterly astounded to find that the head dojo of one of the British Aikido associations was just a mile from my home. In March 2007 I joined the KAA (Komyokan Aikido Association) and began to practice Aikido.

As I write ... I pause ... and take a moment's breath. What an important turning point. Aikido entered into my life and became the spiritual practice I had so long sought. It was the perfect counterbalance to my heady, intellectual self, for it was intensely physical, and always demanding a grounding awareness in the present moment. On the mat there is no time to become lost in thought or to plan. There is only the blending with the other in the moment of attack. In this moment I can contract, close down and miss what is unfolding ... or I can remain

aware, present with myself and the other - yes, the double arrow of attention - and strive to remain centred whilst merging with the incoming energy. Through Aikido I could train and integrate and begin to live some of the principles which I had encountered in my co-researchers' practices. Through Aikido I found the teacher I needed, the one who could act as my mirror and help me see myself more truthfully.

My journey continued. I joined my co-researchers when I could, participated in their work, interviewed them, returned home, went about my daily work as artist, project manager and lecturer, wrote about my experiences, attempted to integrate new insights into my practice whenever I saw the opportunity. My commitment to complete my PhD was strong, for I had received so many gifts from my co-researchers, which compelled me to move ever forward. In Italy Gey Pin had helped me rediscover my singing voice, in New York Dzieci and TAI had given me a renewed vision for theatre's potential in the world, through Odin I had caught glimpses of embodied poetry which wove its magic in the realms beyond the intellect. Even my five-day encounter with the Workcenter which had been far from joyous had become a nourishment for my soul, evoking memories of supreme mastery through an outstanding commitment to the craft, as well as of a sober sense of what it meant to approach the Sacred through theatre. To practice at the Workcenter had been my actor's dream. And yet when I arrived in Pontedera, I dreamed, in the darkness of night, that my path was to lead me elsewhere. As I wrote in my reflections on the dream...

*I came to appreciate that the purpose of my work as an artist and researcher differed from that of the Workcenter. I was a postman, an artist in service of the community. My creativity was to unfold in service of individual and community transformation, my practice was not meant to blossom within the Pontedera monastery. My challenge was one to combine personal rigour and commitment to practice with compassion and person-centred service. [...]*

*Crucially, I believe that the dream also indicated how my future practice was to unfold: To me, the bike path along the seafront indicated a potential working relationship with the ocean, the archetypal image of the Unconscious. Post boxes were set along the path ... which indicated to me that my creative practice would centrally involve my delivery of messages from the Unconscious to other people. By having a direct relationship with the sea, I would enable others to develop their relationship with the ocean. Furthermore, the direct relationship with the sea would bring the success I sought: it would enable me to fly like a bird. I would achieve my own potential, by helping others to realise theirs (Jessica, see Appendix K.4, pp. 25 - 26).*

The ocean held a further challenge in store when I became pregnant in March 2009. At the time I was making good progress with my write-up; however, illness during pregnancy and later the birth of my daughter Amelia by caesarean section inevitably pressed the pause button. The arrival of Amelia became a time of prolonged incubation, marked by great

exhaustion and profound reorientation, of which I have the most elating and exasperating memories. How could I equally nurture two children - one of the imagination, one of the flesh? Time was the answer.

Now it is early 2011. I am again deeply immersed in my PhD journey ... and I'm nearing the end. Looking back ... reflecting upon all that I was privileged to experience ... can I qualify my process of transformation? Can I say I have changed ... that I am profoundly different, a more integrated, more rounded and grounded person? Any such qualification would be trite. What I can say is this: Where seven years ago I was seeking ultimate answers, needing the Absolute to anchor myself, today I feel more comfortable living the questions. I feel rooted in a sense of mystery, reassured by the vastness of the realms beyond my self. Where there was once a desperate need to know, there is now a great love for ambiguity. I am no less fallible a person. Old knots still bind me and trap me. The glimpses of insight which I have been granted are only starting points for further journeys. What has emerged is paradoxical and calls for further self-search. I love walking the path of paradox which spirals ever upward and downward and outward and inward, birthing new levels of insight with every circumambulation. As I follow I feel comforted knowing this: In my surrender lies my creation.

Enter then the alchemist's laboratory for the Creative Synthesis.

# Chapter 6

## Creative Synthesis

The Creative Synthesis is the final phase of a heuristic inquiry. It is a personal work of art, a creative rendition of the essence of a phenomenon explored, which "may be expressed as a poem, story, drawing, painting, or by some other creative form" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). In this Creative Synthesis I shall attempt to describe the essence of Theatre as a Transformative Practice by means of its absence. Hereafter follows no performance, no theatrical experience. In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* Barba & Savarese (1991) quote the Italian writer Giorgio Celli who proposes that

*Anatomy is the description of life by means of its absence. Anatomy celebrates the splendour and the superior geometries of the life of cadavers; therefore life can only become the object of knowledge and observation when it ceases to be life. Life is either lived or described (p. 24).*

Barba & Savarese follows Celli's reasoning, suggesting that performance is either practiced or depicted - a dilemma which at times threatened to tear me apart, for to complete the thesis write-up I had to sacrifice much of my performance practice. In the end I did not have the energy and time to sustain both practice and writing. This said, I do beg to differ with the authors when it comes to the act of observation in life. As Arlene Audergon once said, highlighting the value of self-witnessing in performance,

*... consciousness isn't about staying outside or analysing [...] A really good theatre moment can be more real than real life! It can cut into something that is really human. Whereas when you're jumping around in your everyday life you can be less real ... because you're sort of in it (see page 97).*

Throughout my heuristic inquiry I tried to follow this notion, whether I was partaking in work, observing practice or interviewing my co-researchers. And I hope that my Creative Synthesis retains not only the essence of Theatre as a Transformative Practice but its lively spark which brings one to a place of Active Imagination. The Creative Synthesis is a portrayal of what I consider to be both a universal and a deeply personal process. Whilst I have thus far followed my co-researchers and attempted to convey their understanding with utmost accuracy, in the Creative Synthesis the emphasis shifts toward my own understanding of the actor's work. I believe that at heart, the two are not so very different. As Arlene has expressed to me, in this work "you come to an interface between what is very personal and what is universal" (see

page 95). Thus I invite you to receive the Creative Synthesis as a tapestry of images, metaphors and symbols which point to the transformative journey of the actor as co-creator.

**Before viewing the Creative Synthesis file I would like to ask that you familiarise yourself with the following instructions, so that you may view the file in the right order and in its entirety.**

- The file was constructed using a programme called *Prezi* ([www.prezi.com](http://www.prezi.com)). In order to run the file you will need to open the Creative Synthesis folder (**Appendix L**). Here you will find a ZIP archive which you need to open. Once open, you can run the presentation by clicking on the file called 'prezi.exe'. Let the programme open, maximise the window, and wait until the presentation has loaded and the logo has disappeared from the screen. Then begin to move through the presentation.
- Prezi operates similarly to a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. You will be required to click through each step of the presentation, **by using the arrow keys on your keyboard**. (Alternatively you can use your mouse and click on the arrow keys in the bottom right hand corner of the presentation window.)
- Using your mouse, you can also drag and move the presentation canvas, by pressing and holding the left mouse button whilst moving the mouse.
- Prezi allows you to zoom in and out of the presentation, thereby seeing the larger picture or finer details of the presentation. To zoom in, simply point the cursor at the detail you want to enlarge and click. To zoom out, click on the background (outside of the detailed area). You can also zoom in and out by using the scroll button of your mouse.
- You can leave the path of the presentation at any time if you want to zoom into details. You return to the path by using the arrow keys on your keyboard. **I recommend that you view the entire presentation path first and then zoom around the canvas to explore hidden details.** I have, for example, made use of artworks, in so far they illustrate the journey I am trying to convey. There is no need to read up on what the artists tried to express through their works. Rather, where image choices seem too obscure, I have amplified and explained what the image means to me in the context of the presentation. You can access this material, by clicking and zooming into the image titles.

Before embarking on the Creative Synthesis I would now like to ask you to pause ... to sense inward ... to feel the flow of breath in and out of the body ... to feel the contact with the ground, the chair ... your spine lengthening towards above and below ... and to spend just a few moments, however long appropriate, approaching stillness, silence, no form...

When you are ready, please play the Creative Synthesis file.

# Chapter 7

## Reflections & Discussion

In the following chapter I shall review the research results and contextualise them in light of current scholarly debate in the field. I shall use the Creative Synthesis as my point of departure, amplifying, as well as further explicating my vision of Theatre as a Transformative Practice. I will also offer a re-assessment of heuristic methodology, considering my own experiences with the method.

### **Theatre as a Transformative Practice - a perennial path for growth?**

In the Creative Synthesis I attempted to get to the root of the diverse theatrical practices I encountered, and to uncover something of the underlying essence of the actor's transformative and co-creative journey. In doing so, I suggested that a common structure informs and shapes all experience of Theatre as a Transformative Practice. My depiction appears to point towards a monolithic, perennial vision, suggesting that the actor's journey, whilst varying according to context, is shaped by deep, underlying, universal patterns which give rise to *one path* and *one goal* paradigmatic for all Theatre as a Transformative Practice. When I first set out on my heuristic inquiry, I was drawn towards the idea of perennialism. I was particularly taken by Ken Wilber's Integral Psychology (e.g. 2000) which espouses a universal path of growth for all human beings, no matter what their spiritual orientation, according to an evolutionary hierarchy of invariant spiritual stages. Wilber's unicursal vision was seductive because it offered answers, prescriptively circumventing the unknown. Here the path was ... laid out! For a seeking mind on the hunt for ultimate answers to ultimate questions such seeming clarity was appealing. However, the more I engaged with my co-researchers' practices, and the more profound my relationship with the unknown current became, the less attractive Wilber's perennial safety net appeared to me, and the more I felt empowered and revitalised by ambiguity and paradox. Today, I am most certainly no perennialist. Rather, I would align my views with Jorge Ferrer's (e.g. 2002) participatory vision, which was advanced as a counter to the perennialism that had been dominating transpersonal theory and practice. For interpretation of the Creative Synthesis this means the following:



The underlying structure which informs the actor's journey is less a unilinear sequence of stages, invariant, and all-pervading, and more an organic complex of 'morphic fields'<sup>30</sup>, to use Rupert Sheldrake's (e.g. 1981) term, which inform the actor's processes whilst allowing unique expressions of practice to come into being. Moreover, I construe the path of Theatre as a Transformative Practice as participatory, proposing that the fields of information which shape the actor's experience are not impregnable to change but that they are responsive to and evolve in resonance with the personal, cultural and spiritual contexts within which are they enacted. Ferrer's participatory vision repositions spiritual phenomena as "*participatory events (i.e., emergences of transpersonal being that can occur not only in the locus of an individual, but also in a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place)*" (2002, p. 116). Here the participatory vision particularly fits Theatre as a Transformative Practice, for the actor's work is profoundly relational in nature. As I have suggested, it is through a deepening relationship with the other/Other that the actor participates in events and interactions which lead him beyond egoic consciousness and towards inter-subjective and trans-subjective spheres. Whether we invoke the Transcendent or not, Theatre as a Transformative Practice clearly demands from the actor that he surrender control and lets events unfold. At the same time, the actor's surrender is not a passive one but a participatory and co-creative one. The actor shapes whilst he is shaped, his participation passionate and whole-bodied. For there to be transformative growth, however, the actor must fulfil one crucial condition: Whilst diving into the ocean of creative interaction he must remain present and aware.

## **On the actor's co-creative participation**

Ferrer (2008) asserts that "Human beings are - whether they know it or not - always participating in the self-disclosure of the mystery out of which everything arises" (p. 137). It is our 'participatory predicament', as Ferrer calls it, which is the ontological basis for our spiritual knowing and it is not merely

"a mental representation of pregiven, independent spiritual objects, but an enaction, the 'bringing forth' of a world or domain of distinctions cocreated by the different elements involved in the participatory event. Some central elements of spiritual participatory events may include individual intentions and dispositions; the creative power of multidimensional human cognition; cultural, religious, and historical horizons; archetypal and subtle energies; and perhaps crucially, the apparently inexhaustible creativity of a dynamic and undetermined spiritual energy or generative power of life" (p. 137).

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<sup>30</sup> From Greek, 'morphê' - shape, i.e. 'shaping fields'.

It is such spiritual knowing involving the entirety of the actor's being which is at the heart of Theatre as a Transformative Practice. It is quite apparent that in the mainstream, Western theatre does not automatically invoke spiritual knowing and/or lead to the actor's transformation and growth. As Matt Mitler has expressed, many actors in Europe and the United States are not profoundly balanced, integrated and fulfilled human beings (see Appendix K.5, p. 12), and certainly, few of them relate to the idea of the work as service of ensemble, community, or divine Source. That is not to say that actors working in mainstream theatre cannot have profound experiences in their work. However, I contend that such experiences are not driven by the same intentions - i.e. a focus on self-search and service - and that their occurrence is more accidental rather than purposive. To be clear, the actor who pursues Theatre as a Transformative Practice does so, not seeking extraordinary experiences - for such pursuit would be mere indulgence. Rather, the actor is drawn to pursue the work with a humility and a sense of service and vision. It is through this sense of service to the other, that he becomes more available to, and conscious of, the co-creative relationship with the mystery which transforms his being. This said, actors who pursue the path of Theatre as a Transformative Practice are no less fallible than other human beings and the dangers of absent-mindedness, indulgence, ego inflation and narcissism are always lurking. It is often the presence of others, co-workers and director, which enables the individual actor to stay on track. Fundamentally, however, the actor is tasked with witnessing himself in the process of his co-creative participation.

## **The actor and the witness**

The actor's witnessing process could be described as a state of 'double consciousness'. I use the term to refer specifically to Konijn's (2000) work in which she examined the actor's emotional relationship with his character in the three performance styles which, so Konijn suggests, the Western actor has at his disposal: *involvement* (e.g. Stanislavski), *detachment* (e.g. Brecht) and *self-expression* (e.g. Grotowski). I briefly referred to Konijn's work in my introduction, situating my research in the style of self-expression, and I would like to return to her work here, in order to illuminate further the actor's process of witnessing in Theatre as a Transformative Practice.

Konijn suggests that the actor's emotional processes during performance contain several elements which could lead to a sense of double consciousness. Two types of double consciousness which she discusses are particularly pertinent to our explorations and I would like to consider them here. Konijn describes a phenomenon called *depersonalisation*: "there is a perception of being removed from oneself, watching oneself act. The actor does know that

he is not the character, but he does act like the character” (p. 101). Depersonalisation, also referred to as dissociation, is characterised by “by feelings of unreality, that your body does not belong to you, or that you are constantly in a dreamlike state” (DSM-IV, 300.6). Konijn asserts that many actors describe instances of depersonalisation in their work. In light of my research results I would like to suggest that Theatre as a Transformative Practice leads the actor in the opposite direction, in that it encourages him to feel his body deeply. Drawing from Arlene Audergon’s vocabulary, I might say that the actor enters a dream state which is more real than everyday life, precisely because the dream state is grounded in increased psychosomatic awareness. In theme 3 of the Composite Depiction I described how my co-researchers strive towards inner absence (no-form, stillness, silence) to allow them to engage in their work with increased somatic presence. The actor’s double consciousness during Theatre as a Transformative Practice is therefore not a form of depersonalisation.

Konijn (2000) also describes a form of double consciousness which she suggests arises from the automatization of the actor’s behaviour.

“In as much as the actor has made the character’s behaviour his own, in effect becoming ‘second nature’, we may speak of automatic behaviour in respect to the character to be played. In other words, the (literal) execution of the role in itself has become a routine activity and can be done by the actor on ‘automatic pilot’. [...] This automatic character behaviour is to the actor’s advantage during performance. Because of it, his attention is freed for other aspects of the situation, like unexpected turns, interaction, taking cues, connecting to the audience, and fine tuning of the role” (p. 102).

Theatre as a Transformative Practice certainly involves some automatization of motor behaviour as far as the acquisition of new skills and the learning of vocal and movement scores is concerned. Roberta Carreri and Julia Varley of Odin both describe submitting themselves to long periods of rehearsal in which their scores of action become progressively ‘embodied’ until the scores no longer ‘preoccupy’ them (for Roberta see Appendix K.1, p. 15; for Julia see Appendix K.1, p. 22). We know that the process of learning new motor actions naturally results in the automatization of behaviour (Hartmann, 1958). Once a motor task has been learned it becomes smoother over time, requiring less and less conscious attention. However, there is a catch: Motor behaviour which has been automatized essentially involves the execution of pre-programmed movements without perceptual feedback. Whilst the execution of such behaviour is fast and mentally effortless, it is also unconscious and cannot easily be adjusted (e.g. Jenkinson & Fotopoulou, 2010). In Theatre as a Transformative Practice, automatization is strongly counterbalanced with de-automatization exercises. Whether it is through codified performance work (e.g. Odin) or a strenuous physical practice which demands the execution of impossibly difficult movement sequences (e.g. Dzieci), the

actor is continuously estranged from his 'clichés' and pushed into a state of 'contemplation in action'. In my review of the literature I referred to Deikman (1966) who found that de-automatization of perception, i.e. the loosening of structures which organise, interpret and limit perceptual stimuli, is also a central feature of meditation and contemplation practices. De-automatization cleanses the doors of perception, to use William Blake's (1790 - 1793) phrase, allowing for a less restricted, more direct and lucid vision of the world - or as Antero Alli puts it, "Imagine the least mediated perception and experience you are personally capable of. This is the experiment, the process and the goal" (see page 128).

Ideally, the actor who pursues Theatre as a Transformative Practice balances on the tightrope between automatization and de-automatization, which, I suggest, enables him to enter into a state of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a transcendent state of cognition characterised by a merging of activity and awareness, as well as a heightened sense of control over action. Curiously, Konijn (2000) refers to flow in the context of automatized behaviour, linking it to the sensation that "the role is playing itself", as well as relating it to depersonalisation and "the feeling of watching oneself" (p. 102). I believe that Konijn is mistaken in her suggestion that the actor who is on autopilot can enter a state of flow, for flow precisely entails heightened perception and embodied presence. For the same reason I also do not think that depersonalisation is linked to flow, for depersonalization is characterised by a dissociation from one's body, whereas in flow the body is felt more deeply.

When Konijn speaks of "the role is playing itself" and "the feeling of watching oneself" - both notions to which actors in pursuit of Theatre as a Transformative Practice can certainly relate - the question is: Who is playing? And who is watching? To the second question I shall return shortly. To the first question my answer must be that it is the one whom I call 'the Other' who is playing, the one whom Gurdjieff called the "real I" (in Lancaster, 1991, p. 158) and Jung called the 'Self'. In Theatre as a Transformative Practice the actor strives for de-automatization, precisely to become more aware of the workings of this Other whom he also is and who is really in control. To be clear, de-automatization does not help the 'I' stay in charge of motor behaviour or perceptual processes - for it was never really in charge. Conscious cognition certainly plays a role in the acquisition of new motor skills, but once a new skill has been learned, in order to perform it well the actor must not attempt to control it consciously. As Ang Gey Pin asserts, "Actions which are not lived take place in a kind of slow motion ... controlled by the intellect" (see page 193), in other words, performance degrades when the actor tries to exert conscious control. De-automatization thus does not enable the 'I' to stay in charge - rather it allows the actor to shift the centre of gravity of consciousness from 'I' towards the Other, aligning himself with the true locus of control. It is from this re-alignment that the state of flow, characterised by the merging of activity and awareness and the heightened sense of control over action, arises.

Notions of the Other as the true locus of control raise complex issues concerning the actor's intentionality, responsibility and free will. If our 'I' is ordinarily not aware of the Other and if the Other is really ultimately in control of our actions, do we have free will? Research by Libet (1985)<sup>31</sup> has demonstrated that voluntary actions which the 'I' may claim to have performed 'at will' are indeed initiated unconsciously and that the 'I's sense of intention to act arises shortly after the unconscious initiation of the action has commenced. In other words, even though the 'I' thought it was in control ... it is most certainly not. Thus, we may rightly suggest that the 'I' cannot be considered responsible for its actions. In response to this riddle, Lancaster (1991) has proposed that

"We may either attribute consciousness to the immediate 'I' of experience, calling everything else 'unconscious', or we could call the overall self 'conscious', viewing individual 'I's as parts of the conscious totality. It seems to me that the strongest argument for the latter position is this issue of free will and responsibility. [...] The individual is responsible for their actions, because at some level they exercised their free will in a conscious decision to act. However, at the level of 'I', which may be equated with the trance of everyday life, they may not be aware of the conscious part that made the decision. In that sense only, the higher level may be referred to as 'unconscious'" (p. 170).

Lancaster is not alone in his suggestion. As Jeffrey (1986) puts it aptly in the *Handbook of States of Consciousness*, "The Unconscious is not unconscious, only the Conscious is unconscious of what the Unconscious is conscious of" (p. 275). It seems all the more imperative that individuals attempt to self-remember and become more aware in their everyday lives. Theatre as a Transformative Practice with its drive towards somatic presence and de-automatization is ideally placed to aid individuals to expand their circles of awareness, alleviating what Lancaster (1991) calls the "trance of everyday life" (p. 170).

Let us return to the second question raised in conjunction with Konijn's ideas. In the state of re-alignment of 'I' with 'Other' is there still a double consciousness, a "feeling of watching oneself" (Konijn, 2000, p. 102)? I would suggest not, for this feeling implies a separation, a split of consciousness where there is, as Csikszentmihalyi affirms, only the merging of action

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<sup>31</sup> Libet instructed his subjects to produce simple movements of the wrist or fingers 'at will'. The subjects were instructed to pay attention to their own mental processes and to attempt and detect the moment of onset of the urge or decision to act. During the course of the experiment the subjects also observed a clock face. The intention was that they would subsequently recall precisely at what time they had become aware of wanting to move. Thus the timing of the conscious event could be determined. Two physiological measures were also recorded with the intention of relating the timing of the subjective experience to the objective physical occurrence. One was a measure of the electrical activity in the muscles to be moved (EMG), and the other was the brain electrical activity recorded from the scalp. The brain electrical activity associated with voluntary acts takes the form of a slow negative shift in potential which has been called the *readiness potential*. The key result from Libet's work was that the readiness potential onset was on average 535 milliseconds before the activation of the muscle as indexed by the EMG, and 345 milliseconds before the reported time of the subject's conscious intention to act.

and awareness. There is, however, the experience of being witnessed - which I shall call the 'witnessing function' in order to side-step the issue of subject and object, for I cannot say who is witnessing. I can only depict the experience of the witnessing function as an all-pervading, timeless and unchanging sense of 'being seen' which envelopes my entire being - if I care to notice it: and such is the demand of Theatre as a Transformative Practice. To pause, to notice!

In his explorations of *Theatre and Consciousness*, Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005) draws on Vedic Science as developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to illuminate states of artistic inspiration. He describes higher states of consciousness, which I believe, strongly resonate with my observations. Specifically, Meyer-Dinkgräfe refers to *pure consciousness* and *cosmic consciousness*. Pure consciousness, also referred to as *samadhi* in Sanskrit, is a state of consciousness which serves as the basis of the ordinary states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and sleeping. It is "without contents, but fully awake" (p. 23). If pure consciousness arises and is maintained alongside waking, sleeping, or dreaming it is referred to as cosmic consciousness "which is never overshadowed in daily experience by the activities and experiences of the individual psyche" and which when fully established "becomes a 'stable internal frame of reference from which changing phases of sleep, dreaming, and waking life are silently *witnessed* or observed'" (p. 25). I believe that when the actor is able to tap into the 'witnessing function' he may be accessing a state of cosmic consciousness. I further agree with Meyer-Dinkgräfe's assertion that "This double nature of experience [...] is not equivalent to an uncomfortable dissociation or split personality" (p. 26). Similarly I have refuted above that the actor's double consciousness is a form of depersonalisation as Konijn (2000) suggests. Discussing the witnessing process in creative activity Malekin and Yarrow (1997) reach the same conclusion: They speak of "self-loss" or "self-transcendence" in "unconditionality" which opens the way to "relatedness, in which universality becomes more evident than separation" (p. 82).

Following the teachings of Vedic Science, Meyer-Dinkgräfe depicts even higher states/stages of consciousness which follow cosmic consciousness. Citing Alexander and Boyer (1989), Meyer-Dinkgräfe describes *refined cosmic consciousness* as the next level on which previous functioning is maintained and "combined with the maximum value of perception of the environment. Perception and feeling reach their most sublime level" (p. 27). Finally, in *unity consciousness* "The experiencer experiences himself and his entire environment in terms of his own nature, which he experiences to be pure consciousness" (p. 28). Whilst my reading of mystical and allied literature has certainly awakened my interest in such states, I did not find evidence amongst my co-researchers of such ultimate states of consciousness. For me to comment further means moving into territory beyond that which can be mapped in accordance with the data I have presented. With this note of caution let me suggest that the perennialism implied in notions of unity consciousness is not necessarily at odds with the

participatory vision I articulated earlier. Whilst Ferrer (2002) seems to oppose his participatory vision to the perennialism he criticises, there is no convincing argument that this should be so. The core issue in this debate concerns the ontology of the Unity which is seemingly experienced in a state labelled 'unity consciousness'. Whilst the classical perennialist would regard the Unity as a transcendent absolute, the person committed to a participatory vision would no doubt emphasise the co-created basis of *all* experience. We are rapidly moving into areas of theology and philosophy that lie beyond my remit in this thesis. The backbone of my work here is constituted by the data drawn from my experiences and those of my co-researchers; to quote Wittgenstein (1922), 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' (7).

Let us return to the witnessing function, to which Grotowski (1990) also appears to allude in his text *Performer* when he speaks of the 'I-I'.

"There is an I-I. The second I is quasi virtual; it is not - in you - the look of the others, nor any judgement; it's like an immobile look: a silent presence, like the sun which illuminates the things - and that's all. [...] I-I: in experience, the couple doesn't appear as separate, but as full, unique" (p. 378).

Grotowski asserts that the actor can become more aware and serve the life of 'I-I' only through being "passive in action and active in seeing (reversing the habit). Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present" (ibid). My co-researchers refer to this reversal of habit as 'active receptivity' and 'movement and repose' - as articulated in theme 4 of the Composite Depiction. Grotowski suggests that the presence of a teacher can also help the actor develop the 'I-I', for the teacher acts as a mirror of the witnessing function - a notion which is also present in my research results, see theme 6 of the Composite Depiction. Here my co-researchers describe the 'heat' of 'being seen' which fuels their inner awareness, and they describe the importance of the other (teacher/ director/ therapist/ audience) as mirror. It is through the gaze of the other that the actor's connection to the 'I-I' can be heightened.

The witnessing function also plays a central role in the dynamic between creativity and psychopathology. In my literature review I introduced research which shows that there are common biological, cognitive and emotional roots to creativity and psychotic disorders - a fact which ought to be of concern to those who draw upon creative practices in the treatment of mental ill health. I referred to Carl Jung who stressed that the process of active imagination is not without its dangers, for it can lead to the spontaneous eruption of unconscious contents into the conscious mind - a notion which is reflected in theme 8 of the Composite Depiction where I highlighted a number of potential dangers and pitfalls of Theatre as a Transformative Practice, from psychophysical irritation and shock to forced catharsis. Knowing of the correlation between creativity and mental illness, we need to ask under which conditions

creative work aids mental wellbeing and health, and under which conditions it overwhelms the individual and leads to psychic breakdown. Based on my research results, I would like to suggest that a relationship with the 'witnessing function' is one of the crucial conditions under which a creative process - which might otherwise be merely diversive or worse, potentially destructive - becomes healing and transformative.

In order to grasp why witnessing is critical in this context, we need to explore the phenomenon of projection. In my literature review I highlighted that projection is a universal human phenomenon which prevents us from seeing the world as it is. Instead we see the world as we are. There are numerous examples of how our memories, our beliefs and our imagination shape our perception. A basic example is that of the blind spot on the back of each eye where the optic nerve leaves the retina. There is no visual sensitivity in this spot and as such we should have holes in our vision. The brain, however, readily extrapolates information to cover the gaps. It may be more accurate to say that we apperceive (anticipate) the world around us, rather than perceive it. During the act of perception, our "a priori considerations (including needs, drives, affects, expectations, etc.) [are] all exported by projective identification, which transforms the image of the real object into a phantom (even during moments of extreme trauma). This phantom becomes a compounded, or third, form, a montage, a chimera (hybrid, containing many disparate forms), which ultimately becomes far removed in nature and composition from the original object in reality" (Grotstein, 2008, p. xix). When it comes to memory the mind has the same tendency to fill the gaps (i.e. incomplete or nonsensical ideas) with (confabulated) material that is meaningful in terms of a person's own knowledge (Lancaster, 1991). It is the witnessing function, mirrored in the observation of the actor's work by his teacher, therapist, director, co-worker and sometimes his public spectator, which counteracts projection and cleanses the doors of the actor's perception. A cleansing of perception through a deepening relationship with the witnessing function, combined with a shift of gravity of consciousness from 'I' to Other is what facilitates healing and growth within the individual. We need to examine another piece in the puzzle to understand why this might be so.

"...so the spiritual traditions insist, individuals may play their part in the cosmic process [...] only when the mirror of their personal consciousness is cleansed. This requires awareness of the simple process of becoming which underlies 'I', uncluttered by the accretions which 'I' makes in its desire for security. This alone, the deepest knowledge of self, is the precondition for restoring balance on the cosmic, as well as the personal, scale. 'Can you polish your mysterious mirror,' asks Lao Tzu, 'and leave no blemish?'" (Lancaster, 1991, p. 76).



## At the heart of creation

In my Creative Synthesis I suggested that the process of change through Theatre as a Transformative Practice involves the notion of 'death' and 'rebirth'. Such stark imagery and so counter-intuitive, one might say, for death and rebirth are not usually part of our everyday experience - and whilst we might witness the death of close friends and family, we certainly don't have much experience with our own death and rebirth! Yet there is good reason to hold that the 'I' which we seem to rely upon in ordinary life is not a permanent fixture but a construct which is re-created from moment to moment. As Lancaster (2004) puts it,

"The mind rushes into an inference, a *meaningful interpretation* to explain the data of the senses. And 'I' may be understood within this context: it is the mind's most successful manoeuvre for increasing the sense of meaning. [...] The mind synthesizes a narrative that fits the available information into a story that is structured around a logic of causation. And central to the mind's narratives is the 'center of narrative gravity' itself, namely 'I'" (p. 164).

The notion of 'I' as construct is recognised in cognitive psychology where the 'I' is merely a representation required for the illusion of coherence within the system (Blackmore, 1986; Oatley, 1988). That the 'I' is a construct is also evident from neurological cases in which patients continually reinvent themselves in a drive to maintain their sense of identity (Sacks, 1985).

"This drive to construct a personal narrative identity is not easily dismissed as merely a peculiar feature of neurological damage. Sacks sees it as an essential feature in the make-up of each of us. The neurological damage simply renders it more apparent. Whereas normally the construction of 'I' is so seamless that we hardly realize it occurs, in these patients, the construction becomes a struggle, and therefore very evident" (Lancaster, 2004, p. 165).

Lancaster also cites Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1999) who similarly assert that their experiences of patients who have sustained damage to various parts of the brain points to the same conclusion: "that you create your own 'reality' from mere fragments of information" (in Lancaster, 2004, p. 165). The idea that the 'I' lacks substance is further in accord with teachings in many spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, the Kabbalah and Sufism, which emphasise the ego's lack of continuity and highlight the notion of 'becoming', meaning that at root the 'I' is a process rather than a fixed structure. According to Kabbalistic teachings, the challenge of the adept is it to recognise the illusory nature of 'I' and to reconcile it with the divine Other. In this quest for (re)unification we encounter again the 'I-I' in such phrases as "I-I the Lord" (Isaiah, 43:11), the doubling of 'I' being interpreted by kabbalists as expressing the

union of the divine with human domains. The teachings of the Hindu sage Sri Ramana Maharshi seem to reflect the same idea:

“By inquiring into the nature of the I, the I perishes. With it you and he [objects] also perish. The resultant state, which shines as Absolute Being, is one’s own natural state, the Self. [...] If one inquires ‘Who am I?’ within the mind, the individual ‘I’ falls down abashed [...] and immediately Reality manifests itself spontaneously as ‘I-I’” (in Lancaster, 1991, p. 77).

Within the Creative Synthesis I made a tangential reference to quantum mechanics (see the text under the image featured in ‘Awareness leads mind into the unknown currents...’), drawing upon the famous double-slit experiment as a metaphor to illustrate the nature of reality which awaits the actor beyond the ordinary level of ‘I’. I noted that what is paradoxical at the macrocosmic level (the level of our everyday experience) is not so at the microcosmic level (the level of impulse and intuition through which the actor communes with the Other) where particles exist in a state of superposition, meaning that they are simultaneously particle and wave.<sup>32</sup> In the realm of the psyche we find a phenomenon, which seems analogous to superposition, and this is the multiplicity of meaning. As Lancaster (2004) asserts, “there is indeed good evidence for such *multiplicity in preconscious processing*. Consciousness demands the *either ... or* state; preconsciousness may embrace the multiplicity in the *both ... and* state” (p. 118). In other words, ‘I’ requires fixity and specificity whereas ‘not-I’ embraces ambiguity and multiplicity. When the actor shifts the centre of gravity of consciousness from the ‘I’ to the Other, he enters a state of being which is less mediated and less differentiated. Here, fixity of perception and paradox of thought give way to openness and fluidity which in turn may usher in higher levels of insight and birth a new, more expansive and more malleable ‘I’. The birth of the new ‘I’ unfolds almost concurrently through the act of observation, the witnessing function which collapses superposition into renewed actuality and fixity. As the actor flows with the currents of his impulses, witnessing his breakdown and fall into freedom, he participates in his renewed creation, descending and ascending. Just as the double-slit experiment tells us, that the very act of observation and the choice which it implies collapses particle-wave potentiality into actuality. As the actor’s old ‘I’ dies, so the new ‘I’ is born and the rotation of the wheel of transformation commences anew.

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<sup>32</sup> The quantum physicist Amit Goswami (1993) goes further and asserts that “we must also say that the electron [or any other quantum particle, JB] is neither a wave (because the wave aspect never manifests for a single electron) nor a particle (because it appears on the screen at places forbidden for particles). [...] This is much like the logic of the idealist philosopher Nagarjuna in the first century CE, the most astute logician of the *Mahayana* Buddhist tradition [and one of the most central figures who influenced Grotowski’s thought, JB]. Eastern philosophers communicate their understanding of ultimate reality as *neti, neti* (not this, not that)” (p. 71).

My references to quantum mechanics must remain a metaphor. I am no physicist and cannot make ontological claims concerning the nature of consciousness and its involvement with matter. However, there has been a number of physicists like Wolfgang Pauli (e.g. in Meier, 2001) and Amit Goswami (1993), as well as biochemists and biologists like Ulrich Warnke (1998) and Bruce Lipton (2008) who have been investigating the interface between quantum physics and other scientific disciplines, such as biochemistry, medicine and psychology. Goswami (1993), for one, suggests that the psyche is a quantum system subject to the same laws as submicroscopic matter, and he boldly asserts that as we choose, so we are (p. 105 - 112). Biologist Bruce Lipton (2008) similarly tells us that our beliefs and choices govern our psychophysical reality. Lipton is a firm proponent of *epigenetics*, a branch of biology which explores the causal interactions between our genes and the environment, and he suggests that our genes are regulated and remodelled in response to our perceptions which in turn are shaped by our beliefs. As we believe, so we are. Crucially, Lipton emphasises that our beliefs are not mere creations of the conscious mind but that they are habitual pathways, learned and conditioned responses which can be adjusted only in collaboration with the subconscious mind. Similarly, whilst asserting that as we choose so we are, Goswami asserts that the subject that chooses is “not our personal ego” (1993, p. 112). In its place Goswami puts a nonlocal, universal observer (who, I suggest, may be identical with that which I have described as the ‘witnessing function’), thereby adapting an idealist perspective which is at odds with the mainstream materialist view prevalent in the West. To date, both Lipton’s and Goswami’s ideas are still regarded as controversial and not accepted within mainstream science. They are, however, indicative of the gradual shift in paradigm which has been unfolding across the natural sciences for the last decades. We are slowly laying to rest the dualist and materialist worldview which has dominated much of our scientific discourse, and we are beginning to embrace a more holistic, introspective and unified cosmology in which consciousness plays a central part.

## The wheel of transformation

Going on means going far  
Going far means returning  
*Tao Te Ching*

As my Creative Synthesis I created a Mandala<sup>33</sup>, a circular image composed of metaphors drawn from alchemical and sacred texts, as well as visionary artworks, because they aptly capture the transformative dynamics at work. At heart, the actor's work on himself, has a circular quality which is also apparent in many mystical and martial arts traditions, such as Taoism, Tai Chi Chuan, the Whirling Dervishes and Aikido where much of the work revolves around the development of awareness of one's physical centre of gravity which is also regarded as the seat of one's life energy, the dwelling place of inner essence. Purce (2007) describes the evolutionary journey as a spherical vortex around this centre of essence, from which we expand outward, externalizing and developing our individual personality in the first half of life, and towards which we strive in our later years, inbound, returning homeward. We see at the centre both our source and our goal: What had been the Golden Egg, the Golden Age from which we emerged ... becomes in the end the Golden Fleece or the Alchemical Gold, our ultimate end; and each winding around the centre marks the ending of a cycle, a completion which is also a beginning.

"The recurrent moments of crisis and decision, when understood, are growth junctures, points of initiation which mark a release or death from one state of being and a growth or birth into the next. 'How many times,' said Yeats, 'man lives and dies between his two eternities'" (p. 15).

This circular or spiral quality can also be found in alchemy. As the hermetic philosopher Jean d'Espagnet asserts, the work of the alchemist lies "only in the rotation of the elements. For the material of the stone passes from one nature into another..." (in Roob, 2005, p. 30) until the lapis emerges. Similarly, to me the journey of actor as creator is a cyclical process of refinement, never quite complete. The actor forever circles around the Work, forever spirals from one level of experience and insight to the next, becoming engrossed, becoming stuck, becoming lost and breaking through when it is least expected - whilst moving ever closer to the ideal, the 'body of essence' as Grotowski called it. In the Hindu tradition the body of essence is also called the Diamond Body (in Purce, 2007, p. 16), a body that is both

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<sup>33</sup> The Mandala (Sanskrit for 'circle') is a central symbol in many wisdom traditions throughout the East and it is also in abundance in Medieval Christian works. Jacob Böhme called it the 'Philosophical Eye' or the 'Mirror of Wisdom' (in Chodorow, 1997, p. 78), for the Mandala is said to represent the summa of a tradition's secret knowledge. Carl Jung worked with the Mandala in psychoanalysis, regarding it as the chief symbol of the totality of the psyche.

transparent and unchangeable. As Purce puts it, “The goal is at once a perfection of and a release from the self” (ibid). The state of perfection is not a static one but a dynamic equilibrium achieved through the fusion of opposites, which is perfectly represented in the symbol of the Yin Yang. It is the actor’s task to find balance through this fusion of opposites with each turn of the wheel, aligning himself with the unchanging essence which he also is. Thus, with each turn of the wheel a new self is born and the actor is once more forever changed.

## **The Heuristic Inquiry: A Re-assessment**

As my writing of the PhD thesis draws to a close I look back over seven years of engagement with the Heuristic Inquiry as conceived by Clark Moustakas (1990). I first encountered and used the method in 2004 during my MSc thesis project and I found it so compelling that I adopted it as my research method when embarking on the PhD. In many ways my work with the method unfolded as expected, in that it developed a dynamic of its own. The Heuristic Inquiry truly requires the researcher to let go of the known, to jump into the river and to follow the unknown current. Throughout the inquiry I found that the phases of my research (see Chapter 2, page 15 -25) were not mere outer structures, mechanically driving my data gathering and analysis, but internal processes, profoundly intrinsic to my experience. As such, periods of immersion, incubation, illumination and explication were not rigid but dynamic and organic, weaving a lived pattern of contradiction, con-fusion, surrender and insight.

As the research unfolded I discovered that there were strong parallels between my topic and the method (see TAI, page 174). The alchemical metaphor which I employed in my Creative Synthesis pertains not only to Theatre as a Transformative Practice but to the Heuristic Inquiry as well. The inquiry became my Magnum Opus and I became the crucible in which the alchemical processes unfolded, thus transforming the *prima materia* of my raw ideas and thoughts, pre-conscious and half-formed, into the lapis: the Creative Synthesis. Despite my steady progress throughout the inquiry, this close engagement with the research method and topic was always of concern to me. I was wary of narcissism and solipsism. I was worried that despite my best efforts to be present with my co-researchers’ and their practices I would be but a tourist, jumping from encounter to encounter, potentially failing to dig deep (see Workcenter, Appendix K.4, p. 24) and only re-enforcing my own beliefs and ideas. I was also concerned about the boundaries between the co-researchers and myself, wondering to what extent my self-disclosure could become an imposition (see Dzieci, Appendix K.5, p. 31).

To counter those concerns I sought validation of the data from my co-researchers, returning interview transcripts and cluster depictions to them and integrating their feedback and

corrections into the depictions (all feedback received has been filed in **Appendix M**). However, not all co-researchers chose to give (extensive) feedback. Some returned no feedback at all. Furthermore, I knew that I could not solely rely on my co-researchers to validate my work and alleviate my concerns; and I became increasingly aware of the degree of discipline and personal integrity which my journey as adept-artist-researcher demanded from me. Intellectually I had always known that my PhD journey would be more than an academic exercise and that it would entail a journey of personal development. Such were the parameters of a Heuristic Inquiry. It was during my time at the Workcenter that these parameters began to come into an experiential focus and I realised that my journey as researcher could only come to full fruition if Jessica, the artist, could commit to the continuous and rigorous development of her craft, and if Jessica, the adept, could submit to one practice, one coherent path. My commitment to my own development crucially necessitated the acknowledgement, expression and transformation of internal resistance which emerged as part my research. Sela-Smith (2002) regards the work with inner resistance as a crucial aspect of heuristic research; and time and again my co-researchers also emphasised that “what seems disturbing, like a tick and the last thing you’d want, is actually the beginning of a whole discovery process” (e.g. Arlene Audergon, see page 94). Looking back, I can say that the moments of discomfort and pain which I experienced as part of my research were truly gateways towards deeper levels of insight and realisation. Upsetting and uncomfortable experiences, such as my encounters at the Workcenter, my crisis in the Creative Dynamic and The Alchemy Laboratory, challenged me deeply, calling attention to underexposed and un-integrated psychic material, thus gradually enabling me to grow beyond the person I was when I set off on my journey in 2004. Yet how to capture this change? And how to articulate it without succumbing to indulgence and solipsism?

My concerns regarding the self-referential nature of heuristic research have stayed with me until the end; and it worries me that, in a very real sense, I remain the ultimate judge of the successes or failings of this research project. As I have discussed in chapter 2, Moustakas (1990) and Polanyi (1969) both assert that “...there are no rules to guide verification that can be relied on in the last resort; the scientist must make the ultimate judgement” (Polanyi in Moustakas, 1990, p. 33). Bridgman (1950) further emphasised the subjective bases of all scientific validation processes and their dependence on the researcher’s judgement. Yet whilst I believe in the validity of my findings and will defend them without hesitation, I feel discomfort at the thought that the ultimate judgement rests with me and me alone. It is Dzieci’s assertion that we cannot see ourselves but through the eyes of others (see page 270) which troubles me. As I highlighted in Chapter 2 whilst discussing Sela-Smith’s (2002) critique of Moustakas’ method, the challenge of a Heuristic Inquiry lies precisely in the balancing of other and self through congruent relationships. Considering my ‘touristic’ encounters with my co-researchers can I claim to have sufficiently cleansed the mirrors of my perception? Can I

claim to have been able to see my co-researchers and myself? Or in the words of Dzieci: Have I succeeded in exercising a 'double arrow of attention'? The feedback which my co-researchers gave me on my work suggests that I have. I wish, however, that I had had more substantial contact with these co-researchers. To me the heuristic path has been a lonely one, and to maintain my practice and integrate new findings into my life and creative work and thus make sense of them has been a challenging process. I am tempted to say that here in Liverpool I have had no one to guide my practice and that the written feedback from my co-researchers, correcting my work at a distance, has been a poor replacement for our personal contact and the work we have done together. And yet there have been others who have acted as my mirrors and who have helped me shape my practice and bring my thesis into focus. These are my academic supervisors, my colleagues and clients at Creative Alternatives, the performing artists who have worked with me in my theatre laboratories, and my teachers at the Komyokan Aikido dojo. Nowhere have I been more challenged to see myself as I am ... and to see my life and work for what it is.

To me, the answer to the conundrum of solipsism in heuristic research lies essentially in the quality of relationship which the primary researcher is able to establish with his co-researchers. Hiles' (2001) suggestion to make co-researcher feedback an integral seventh phase of heuristic research seems very appropriate to me. I would go further and propose that this seventh phase ought not only involve returning written works to the co-researchers for verification, but revisiting the co-researchers for a deepening of the relationship - through follow-up interviews and other kinds of (practical) engagement, as appropriate. I believe that it is only through such deepening encounters with others that the primary researcher will be able to progress in his self-search and self-discovery. This said, the primary researcher does not solely depend on others. I also believe that processes of self-validation in heuristic research could be enhanced. Moustakas (1990) suggests that all heuristic research begins with self-dialogue. Yet, as far as I can ascertain he makes no recommendations as to what such self-dialogue might entail in practice. Reflecting on my own experiences, I submit that it would help researchers to create self-search markers which could take the form of written statements, visual maps, collages, etc. to record and map the process of self-change. Throughout this inquiry I kept track of my inner processes through a diverse range of serendipitous, creative activities (from creative writing, to expressive drawing, to dance and movement), utilising my freelance engagements as artist to integrate insights derived from my inquiry - yet I did so in an unstructured way. My recommendation to those endeavouring to engage in heuristic research would be to find a disciplined way of tracking self-change.

One further challenge within this Heuristic Inquiry has been the issue of data saturation. Comparing my work with other heuristic studies (e.g. Wismer Bowden, 1998; de Vries, 2004; Evans, 2008; Miles & Mikulec, 2008) I have compiled considerably more data, aiming for

cluster depictions where standard heuristic studies feature individual depictions. Yet I still feel that my contact with my co-researchers has been limited and the data which resulted from it was in part still somewhat rudimentary. To grasp a person's, or company's, practice which has developed over decades ... can a few interviews and some brief moments of participation in their work really suffice? It is said that theoretical saturation is reached when no new ideas emerge, however, in practice, such data saturation would probably take a lifetime! Approaching university deadlines and a need for closure intervened and brought the nature of PhD research and its necessary limited scope into focus. In her critique of Moustakas' method Sela-Smith (2002) criticises a number of Heuristic Inquiries for being guided by procedural rules rather than by their internal, tacit processes. Whilst I agree with Sela-Smith that the subjective processes should be the central guiding factor, I also know of the advantages of schedules, deadlines and limitations. Were all heuristic researchers to go by their subjective experience alone, without boundaries, I doubt that many heuristic studies would ever end. Thus, alongside the subjective process there must always also be an outer focus, a questioning of purpose and of what is necessary. By the time I had created my Composite Depiction and Creative Synthesis I felt confident that the data had reached an appropriate saturation point, resulting in coherent and sufficiently nuanced findings.

Here it is important to emphasise the limitations of this study: My findings must be understood as context specific. Whilst I like to point to the idea that what is unique and idiosyncratic is often at root archetypal (e.g. see Arlene, page 95), I would not suggest that my ideas concerning the actor's journey of transformation universally resonate with all forms of theatre practice around the world. Whilst there has been much cross-fertilization in the practices I have explored, the practices really centre around the European and the North-American actor and his psychic constitution - Ang Gey Pin forms an exception to this rule, of course. Much like Grotowski in his Objective Drama phase (see page 68) I have tried to trace the similarities between a range of practices, focusing on the psychophysical effect of each practice upon the actors, i.e. my co-researchers and me. What I have extracted and articulated in the Composite Depiction and Creative Synthesis must be understood as such - and not as a guide to a homogenous system which might claim to include and supersede the practices researched. In terms of limitations, it should also be clear that my study focused upon the experiences and insights of actors, touching only tangentially on the spectator - who is, of course, also central to the artform. I shall return to this point when I come to make recommendations for future research.

Before doing so, I would like to conclude my re-assessment of the Heuristic Inquiry, by amplifying the rather striking resemblances which I discovered between my research method and my topic, for these point not only to the creative qualities of heuristic research, but more



importantly to the potentially invigorating and stimulating role which creative practice can play in qualitative research.

## Heuristic research as creative practice

Let us return to one of the major criticisms of heuristic research which I highlighted in chapter 2, namely that in heuristics ‘anything goes’. Whilst I have conceded that heuristics is by its very nature a method in the making, intuitive and fluid, it is also deeply driven, informed and structured by underlying principles. I uncovered these principles in the process of my research: Gradually unveiling the profound resonance between my method and my topic, I realised that heuristic research is essentially a creative practice - and in any serious creative practice it is utterly farfetched to say that “Anything goes!” In the theatre no other than Grotowski (1990) emphatically stressed the importance of precision and rigour in the execution of the craft: “*Performer* should ground his work in a precise structure - making efforts, because persistence and respect for details are the rigour which allow to become present the I-I. The things to be done must be precise. *Don’t improvise please!*” (p. 378). As I have highlighted in my findings, an artist’s spontaneity must always be balanced with skill and in the end channelled into structure. Or else, one will only flail about and “surely land in the mud,” as Richards puts it (see page 260). What then can be said of the underlying principles which shape creative practice, as well as heuristic research?

1. To begin with, there are striking resemblances between the heuristic process and stage models of creativity (e.g. Wallas, 1926; Runco, 1991; Lubart, 2000). When engaging with a project, both artist and heuristic researcher cycle through phases of conscious preparation and immersion, interjected by periods of incubation in which the project is left to churn beneath the threshold of consciousness, thus leading to moments of illumination - the crucial *eureka!* - and subsequent verification, involving evaluation and refinement of the project outcomes. The resemblance of heuristic and creative processes is hardly surprising when we come to understand both as journeys of (self-)discovery and revelation. As Hiles (2002) asserts, “[T]he works of writers, poets, artists, spiritual leaders and scientists, all invite participation, and in turn promote tacit knowing” (p. 7). Indeed, I would suggest that tacit knowing lies at the root of both heuristic and creative discovery.
2. The artist’s inspiration arises from *presence*, i.e. from the continuous surrender to the present moment, with a comfortable attitude towards not-knowing. As we have seen, this principle is central in Theatre as a Transformative Practice; and Moustakas (1990) also strongly emphasises the heuristic researcher’s need to surrender to the

“unknown current” (p. 13) of the research process. As composer and musician Nachmanovitch (1990) describes it, speaking from personal experience,

“Perhaps we surrender to something delightful, but we still have to give up our expectations and a certain degree of control - give up being safely wrapped in our own story. [...] Surrender means cultivating a comfortable attitude toward not-knowing, being nurtured by the mystery of moments that are dependably surprising, ever fresh” (pp. 21 - 22).

3. The artist serves as channel through which his work manifests. In his practice he is guided by a deeper intelligence, an innate force which bursts forth as the repressive valve of ordinary consciousness is loosened. This force, a raw kind of flow, is known as *ki* in Japan, *kundalini* and *prana* in India, *mana* in Polynesia, and *axé* among the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé cults, to name a few. My co-researchers liken it to ‘electricity’ (see TAI, page 159) and ‘source’ (see Arlene Audergon, page 97 & ParaTheatrical Research, page 126). This innate force is more than mere physical or metabolic energy. It acts upon the artist as a morphic tapestry of patterns, forging his life experiences and his work. Similarly, this force in-forms the heuristic researcher’s path. Following Plato’s idea that learning is really remembering, the researcher flows with the ideas and thoughts of his co-researchers; and as he does so, he begins to release and reveal the original nature of the phenomenon he is investigating - much in the way Michelangelo that liberated the statues that lay buried in the unsculpted blocks of stone before him.
4. For art to appear, I have to disappear. Perhaps the most important principle of all, and one which I have featured at great length in my findings. As Nachmanovitch (1990) puts it, it is the disappearance of ‘I’ which leads me to the “flashpoint of creation in the present moment” (p. 52) where I am created anew in the moment of artistic illumination. It is my experience that the heuristic researcher operates in a similar fashion. When becoming deeply immersed in his research he breaks free from the “habitual overlays of interpretation and conceptualisation” (ibid, p. 54) and merges with the research participants, environments and processes, making use of all modes of knowing - intellectual, bodily, intuitive - only to reappear with deepened insight. Thus the heuristic researcher, too, can assert: For findings to appear, I have to disappear.

In the context of the attenuation of ‘I’, I have previously referred to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) research of flow experience. I return to it here because Csikszentmihalyi’s findings point to a crucial advantage which the Heuristic Inquiry may have over conventional qualitative research methods. Csikszentmihalyi asserts that flow can only be achieved when the activity pursued is *autotelic*, i.e. intrinsically rewarding and

pursued for its own sake. Heuristic research fulfils this condition, for in heuristics the researcher is always personally involved and the research question is also his personal quest. Thus, the Heuristic Inquiry (moreover utilising the entire spectrum of knowing, from intellectual to somatic knowing and intuition) will be more likely to induce flow experience, leading to illuminative, imaginative, state-specific (Tart, 1972) insights, than conventional qualitative research methods which require the researcher to remain objective and uninvolved. In this advantage the Heuristic Inquiry is, of course, not alone. Other less conventional methods, such as Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 1998) and Organic Research (Clements, 2004), share the same quality. At root, these methods are united by an epistemology which recognises the entire spectrum of human sensitivities through which each researcher, deeply involved and familiar with his research, co-creates his findings. As Braud and Anderson (1998) put it, "Reality (being) and knowing are coconstitutive. We can perceive and know only that for which our sensitivities have prepared us, and these sensitivities depend on aspects of our being" (p. 82).

5. Limitations and structure ignite and enliven the creative process. As I have expressed above, the spontaneity of the artist is always channelled and shaped by rules. Indeed, as Nachmanovitch (1990) puts it,

"When we are totally faithful to our own individuality, we are actually following a very intricate design. This kind of freedom is the opposite of 'just anything.' We carry around the rules inherent in our organism. [...] An improviser does not operate from a formless vacuum, but from three billion years of organic evolution; all that we were is encoded somewhere in us. Beyond that vast history we have even more to draw upon: the dialogue with the Self - a dialogue not only with the past but with the future, the environment, and the divine within us. As our playing, writing, speaking, drawing, or dancing unfolds, the inner, unconscious logic of our being begins to show through and mould the material. This rich, deep patterning is the original nature that impresses itself like a seal upon everything we do or are" (ibid, pp. 26 - 27).

Outer limits (in tools, work circumstances, materials and time) give the artist something to work against and yield intensity and focus. The artist may have an initial vision of a piece of art, a painting, a poem, a performance ... but then the circumstances shape and refine the end result. Similarly, the heuristic researcher may have an initial idea about the phenomenon he is about to explore ... but then his relationship to his co-researchers deepens, sharpens and remodels his insights. Above all, both creative and heuristic practice demand time-consuming exploration, the generation of drafts and surplus material, the making of mistakes and the exploration

of dead-ends ... to the end that the artist-researcher hones and refines what is emerging.

Much of the above comparison of creative practice with heuristic research rests on the proposition that creative practice offers a way of gaining deeper insight into world and self, which fundamentally resonates with heuristics. As art therapists Pat Allen (1995) and Shaun McNiff (1998) suggest, art can be a way of knowing, a knowing through active imagination, which at its best may result in revelation and advanced articulation of profound insight, as well as leading to (collective) inspiration and transformation. Like McNiff (1998), I acknowledge that art-based research involves “more ambiguity, risk and uneven results in terms of the end product” (p. 38). However, the outcomes of such research also “tend to be more creative, less mediocre, and more conducive to advancing the sophistication of practice” (ibid). I believe that, alongside other transpersonal research methods, the Heuristic Inquiry has great potential to invigorate mainstream qualitative research. It can point the way towards an expanded science, more imaginative, more embodied and more intuitive.

## **Directions for future research**

It was not my aim within this research project to map and measure the impact of Theatre as a Transformative Practice but rather to illuminate the underlying dynamics at work. Future research could focus on the effects of practice, mapping the changes which Theatre as a Transformative Practice initiates within the individual practitioner, as well as the collective. I suggest that such research ought to be longitudinal and long-term, for changes within the person cannot be captured adequately within a few weeks or months. Furthermore, I would recommend that such research is qualitative rather than quantitative, to ensure rich and complex data from which appropriate questionnaires or scales may be developed in the longer term. When it comes to the effects of creative practice I have all too often witnessed the inadequacy of scales and questionnaires in capturing people’s experience of inner change. As manager of Creative Alternatives, an arts on prescription programme funded by NHS Sefton, I am often asked how the clients of my service have been changed by the creative activities we provide, and I am bound by service-level agreements to evaluate and quantify the programme’s transformative outcomes. But how to measure change in wellbeing and psychosomatic health? Within Creative Alternatives we use a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools, including case studies, artist workshop diaries and participant interviews,

as well as established scales<sup>34</sup> and in-house questionnaires approved by NHS Sefton which are administered prior to and following programme participation. As I have written elsewhere (Bockler & Lovell, 2009), measuring the impact of creative practice upon health and wellbeing remains a problematic enterprise, fraught with difficulty and limitations. As for Theatre as a Transformative Practice, future studies into the effectiveness of practice may be most revealing if they focus on the work of one particular company or individual. Even within my relatively small sample of practitioners, the work unfolded in highly diverse settings and to some extent towards a different purpose - and such variations need to be considered in any investigation of the effects of practice.

Future research could also focus on investigating the dynamics and effects of Theatre as a Transformative Practice in relation to the spectator. Some of my co-researchers indicated how audiences might be affected by their work. Yet my focus in this study was firmly on the actor *rather than the spectator and it took me into settings* (e.g. The Alchemy Laboratory) where the ordinary actor-spectator relationship was not of relevance, *for there were only actors and no audience*. Fundamentally I would submit that the effects of Theatre as a Transformative Practice on the spectator can be expected to be far less significant, for traditional audiences are passive recipients, rather than actively involved players. It is one's active participation in the practice, over months and years, which makes the difference, and not an evening's consumption of a show. As Graeme Thomson of TAI puts it, "We have to change the habits and the muscles of a lifetime" (see page 167) and as such, the person who works on himself is in it for the long haul.

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<sup>34</sup> Between 2007 and 2009 Creative Alternatives employed the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (e.g. Snaith, 2003) and the Dartmouth COOP Charts (Wasson et al, 1992) to measure levels of anxiety and depression, as well as general changes in wellbeing and health. In May 2009, the two measures were dropped and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (Tennant et al, 2007) was adopted.

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