

THE ACTOR AS SHAMAN:

THE SPIRIT IN ACTOR TRAINING

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Abstract

This work springs from a search for ways to bring the sacred hidden depths of the inner worlds back into our theatre; a search for ways to train actors back towards the sacred. Does the language used in traditional actor training techniques affect the way an actor approaches the stage as a sacred space? Does this affect the way the audience relates to what's on the stage? If an actor is encouraged to develop the inner realms/higher self/spirit, does that affect the audience's level of participation? Taking this further, could an actor trained with a more spiritual approach touch the audience today in a more potent way?

One of the central concerns in rediscovering the spiritual aspect of actor training is with the alienation of the feminine by phallogentric masculine language and images of the past, particularly where the concept and language of 'spirit' is concerned. Some re-languaging needs to occur. In terms of actor training, the language of feminist writers assists us into the imaginary zone of the actor. By re-languaging this inner space as the 'Receptive Other', the feminine that has been repressed in all of us is opened away from the masculine imagery of the past and into the female principles of the future.

The production of *Alabama Rain* by Heather McCutchen is the practical component of this doctorate. It was performed over two weeks at downstairs Belvoir Street Theatre in January 1999. The four week rehearsal process for this production involved the developing and testing of specific exercises aimed towards the development of the 'Receptive Other' in the actor.

Introduction

Changing Consciousness, Spiritualities and Language - Re-assessing the Spirit in Actor Training

“When I try to imagine what the theatre can be and will be in the future (I speak neither in the mystical or religious sense at the moment), it will be a purely spiritual business in which the spirit of the human being will be rediscovered by artists.....The actor must know what it is, and how to take it and use it.”¹

This work is a search for ways to bring the sacred hidden depths of the inner worlds back into our theatre; a search for ways to train actors back towards the sacred; a search for a kind of theatre that will remind us of our greatness, a theatre that will “touch on Creation, Becoming and Chaos.”² There are several questions driving this investigation into current actor training. Does the language used in traditional actor training techniques affect the way an actor approaches the stage as a sacred space? Does this affect the way the audience relates to what’s on the stage? If an actor is encouraged to develop the inner realms/higher self/spirit, does that affect the audience’s level of participation? Taking this further, could an actor trained with a more spiritual approach touch the audience today in a more potent way?

One of the central concerns in rediscovering the spiritual aspect of actor training is with the alienation of the feminine by phallocentric masculine language and images of the past. Some re-languaging needs to occur. I also

¹ Chekhov :985:140

acknowledge my position as a woman struggling with the masculine positioning of actor training approaches of the past.³ All well known actor training exercises have been developed by men. At least 50% of actors and acting students are women. The image of woman as perceived by men is inherent in the language of actor training. Therefore the masculine concepts inherent throughout traditional actor training language have to be scrutinised here. As Sue-Ellen Case writes, "The psychological construction of a character using techniques adapted from Stanislavski places the female actor within the range of systems that have oppressed her very representation on stage."⁴ Whilst Case is referring to the repression of the female gender by the ruling masculine constructs, a wider reading could see that it is the feminine in either gender that has been oppressed by a construct that throughout history has refused to acknowledge this voice. As the church took over the realms of the theatre and claimed them for its own, permission to celebrate spirit was severely reduced to the boundaries of the priests and all other forms of worship were seen in such poor light that by the 16th century over nine million people, mostly women, were put to death throughout Europe and America, as a result of this religious conditioning.⁵ The clear establishment of the patriarchal voice over the

2 Artaud:1994:90-91

3 "One of the foremost insights that feminism, especially, has brought to theory is the need to articulate the position from which one speaks" (Mark Fortier:1997:14).

4 Case 1988:122

5 "It is computed from historical records that nine millions of persons were put to death for witchcraft after 1484...and this estimate does not include the vast number who were sacrificed in the preceding centuries upon the same accusation" (Gage 1972:247).

past twenty centuries (particularly through the Bible) combined with the serious denial of the native and female voices suggests the 'feminine' voice is still to be heard although strong headway has been made via the 'feminist' voice. The 'feminine' voice might be called 'yin' or 'soul' or 'shamanic' except these words are even less empowered within the 'public' voice. For the purpose of this writing, I have named the voice of the feminine within everyone as the 'receptive other'. It is this 'receptive other' that has been silenced throughout history. Seen as a state of 'one possessed' the native ritual, the moon worship, the trance medium are all examples of the 'other' receptive to the mystery, the sacred and the spiritual. As Cixous writes;

"Being possessed is not desirable for a masculine imaginary, which would interpret it as passivity.....A woman, by her opening up, is open to being possessed."⁶

Informing Voices of the Past

Many theorists and practitioners from the past have searched for a language and a way to assist the actor in their creation of character. Antonin Artaud criticised the western theatre of his time stating that it lacked a connection to soul and that this was not only a flaw, but a devastating handicap for the actor.⁷ What Artaud meant when he used the word 'soul' is discussed more fully in Chapter One. His use of the word 'metaphysics'⁸ includes the

⁶ Cixous:1993:86

⁷ Artaud:1997:90

⁸ Metaphysics derives from the title posthumously given to a treatise that Aristotle wrote after he had written the Physics. The word metaphysics then came to be used as

realms of the unseen, the unconscious and generally what can't be explained by conscious, rational or logical thought. Metaphysical presence is linked to the revealing of matter via the awareness of the forces at work between people.

Searching for actual exercises for the actor that explore this notion reveals a severe lack, if not a drought of such developments. Artaud certainly explored the senses (aural, visual and olfactory) in his theatre searching for ways into the psyche that bypass the mental and rational aspects of the being. Yet he never recorded any specific exercises for developing these senses or acquiring 'metaphysical presence'.

Various methods of actor training have emerged over the past century, notably those of Constantin Stanislavsky,⁹ Michael Chekhov¹⁰ and Jerzy Grotowski. Linking all three actor training techniques is the search for the spiritual within actor training. Stanislavsky was deeply influenced by Leopold Sulerzhitsky who was the spiritual inspiration behind Stanislavsky's "system".¹¹ With Chekhov's technique the actor explores the creation of a character by physicalizing a "psychological gesture"

a label for the sorts of topics dealt with in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* such as theology, substance, essence, accident, form, matter, actuality and potentiality (Encyc. Brittanica. 1966:260). The term has always suggested some antithesis between the physical and philosophical. Although interestingly, theatre is both an act of the physical and philosophical. "Theological philosophy in general has always constituted a large part of what has been derided and championed as metaphysics" (Encyc. Brittanica. 1966:260).

9 "Stanislavsky sought, through the method of physical action, to overcome what divided mind from body, knowledge from feeling, analyses from action" (Benedetti:1982:66).

10 Gordon:1988:xxxi

11 Gordon:1988:30

through which “the soul of the character and the physical body of the performer meet.”¹² Importantly, both Stanislavsky and Chekhov were influenced by yoga, meditation and Theosophy. Chekhov was deeply inspired by Rudolf Steiner, a Theosophist and the founder of Anthroposophy, and used Steiner’s system of Eurythmy as a part of his own acting system. Chekhov frequently referred to the voice of our other, higher self or ‘higher I’, urging his actors to recognise the higher selves in everyone, particularly the character they are playing. It’s curious as to why Chekhov, obviously drawn to alternative spiritualities and deeply influenced by them, also did not include any of the Theosophical, yogic or meditational exercises in his actor training.

The language used by these theorists/practitioners, although still accessible to actor trainers today is lacking in the ability to define more clearly the spiritual aspects of their work. Helene Cixous talks about the woman’s voyage as a ‘body’, “.....tirelessly listening to what goes on inside.”¹³ The ability of an actor listening to what goes on inside is vital and it was in this region of trying to listen to the inside or inner that Stanislavsky and Michael Chekhov developed their methods for actor training without the benefit of today’s acknowledgement of new-age soul language. As a result, the actor has not been encouraged to enter into the inner realms beyond those of the body, the emotions and the mind. Historical traditions of actor

12 *ibid*

13 Cixous:1993:66

training have excluded the 'receptive other' whilst at the same time searching for a way into those excluded spaces. As an illustration of this, one exercise practised throughout centuries by many traditional primitive societies is that of listening to inner voices that might appear as spirits, visions or just voices. Much weight was given to the importance of these messages, they often gave guidance to the whole tribe. This is an example of the 'receptive other' given freedom to express itself.

For example, Carl Jung discovered an inner voice which he called his guide, Philemon:

"Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I. Psychologically, Philemon represented superior insight."¹⁴

In Carl Jung's view, the imaginative faculty allows us to perceive images which have an a priori existence in the psyche. The psyche here being not just a place inside the mind but a realm or dimension of reality of non-physical character; you might call it the realm of Spirit or the Dreaming. This is the dimension recognised by Stanislavsky, Chekhov, Artaud and Grotowski as important if not vital to the actor's process. Calling it the imagination, soul, spirit or inner realms, they all sought to tap this source.

¹⁴ Jung:1965:183.

Re-Languaging the Inner via the Feminine

Placing spirituality into the more feminine frame of 'receptive other' rather than that of the church, the journey to the inner responds more clearly and freely for actors of today's consciousness. Establishing a common language in the rehearsal space that accurately deals with and opens into interior journeys and unknown spaces has challenged the traditional actor training voices. Stanislavsky certainly sought the spiritual but locked it into the masculine voice of the time, blocking, perhaps fearing, (with his culture) the call to be possessed. Perhaps the theatre practitioner/theorist/director has been afraid of entering a certain receptivity seeing it as 'feminine' or the 'receptive other' and therefore dangerous. Radical Feminist theories have brought to light what might be regarded as the 'shadow' side of patriarchal western constructs.¹⁵ Particularly in identifying the 'other' that has been denied, repressed and left out of the matrix. The matrix being "an environment in which a thing is developed"¹⁶ that is, our culture and our concepts. This has affected many disciplines, from psychoanalytic theory to theatre; creating a language within which the 'other' can exist.

Today there is a greater recognition of the 'soul' or 'spirit' outside the boundaries of the church. What has been considered sacred knowledge for centuries is being shared with a larger portion of society, particularly the knowledge held by the aborigines of the earth. It is a different world and

¹⁵ "Feminist theory is directly and predominantly political. Feminism works towards the unravelling and overthrow of patriarchy" (Fortier 1997:70).

climate for theatre. The realm calling out to us today for investigation is the realm of soul, which although acknowledged by Stanislavsky,¹⁷ Michael Chekhov¹⁸ and Grotowski,¹⁹ lacks both the spiritual and shamanic voices of today's language. Permission is needed by the actor in their most vulnerable state to go within and discover freely their "underground streams."²⁰ The collective unconscious lies in waiting if the actor can remind herself that being possessed is desirable. As Cixous states, "Through the same opening that is her danger, she comes out of herself to go to the other, a traveller in unexplored places."²¹ This could be seen as the actor's quest today. 'She' being read as the actor and the 'other' being the audience who might be waiting for this meeting to take place in the theatre. It is vital for the reader to understand that this work aims to free the repressed feminine within both the male and female actor. It is not intended for just the female actor.

16 Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder 1993:942

17 "Without emotional identification there is no life of the spirit...An actor's habits do not only seep into a person's character, they actually change him (sic) physiologically and spiritually. The actor sets himself (sic) the aim of creating a life of the human spirit" (Stanislavski:1948:141,149,155).

18 "He dreamed of a new acting mode that contained a larger and deeper component, more akin to the ecstatic religiosity of the ancient Greeks..." (Gordon:1991:xvi).

19 "We attempt to eliminate his (sic) organism's resistance to this psychic process" (Grotowski 1968:20).

20 *ibid.*

21 Cixous:1993:86

The Actor as Shaman

This analogy also takes us to the liminal site of shamanic experience. The shaman has traditionally been seen by the tribe as the site of connection (actor) between the spirit world (other) and the human physical world (audience):

"The function of artists is to be more than entertainers. They are also considered to be mediums between the people and the gods. For this reason they need to have spiritual knowledge and the ability to invoke this innate energy."²²

For thousands of years the shaman was the traditional link between the tribe and their gods. Shaman is derived from a Tungus word (from Siberia) 'saman'. As Walsh states:

"Samanism can be defined as a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves or their spirit, travelling to other realms at will, and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community."²³

Often the shaman travels to the other side to recover souls of the dying, to make pacts with angered spirits, to discover the future of the crops etc. The shaman is the key performer of the village, able to enter into an altered state of connectedness with the spirit world. Shamanism and similar areas of research have gained in significance because they postulate new ideas about mind and spirit. They speak of things like vastly expanding the realm of

²² Lendra (ed.)Zarrilli:1995:154

²³ Walsh:1990:11

consciousness.²⁴ Connecting to the soul is perhaps the most transferable aspect of the journey of the shaman (spiritual mediums work in a similar way, connecting to the souls of the dead to convey messages to the living).

In shamanic and spiritual rituals, the imagination is called forth in many ways to the degree that the performer's senses are altered resulting in the altering of the senses of the tribe or audience. As modern psychology has established, there are answers to many questions locked away in the landscapes of our imaginations. Stanislavsky also drew on this as indicated in his statement: "We must not overlook the fact that many important sides of our complex natures are neither known to us nor subject to our conscious direction."²⁵ The actor as the audience's/tribe's representative, would be the traveller we would expect to see in such places. If we can free the site of the 'receptive other' from patriarchal constraints and fear, then the actor might once again become our 'medium'. One who has crossed the boundary of the known into the unknown.

The way we train actors affects their ability to reflect the many dimensions of our humanity and our potential back to us. David Tacey says, "The only way to develop a spiritually powerful culture in Australia is to enter more

24 "The belief, the knowledge, and even the experience that our physical world of the senses is a mere illusion, a world of shadows, and that the three-dimensional tool we call our body serves only as a container or dwelling place for Something infinitely greater and more comprehensive than that body and which constitutes the matrix of the real life" (Kalweit:1988).

25 Stanislavski:1986:170

into the psychic field of nature: to 'shamanise' ourselves."²⁶ It seems we must draw on inspiration for our art wherever there is movement and growth in our culture and theatre must grow if it is to honestly plumb the depths of the worlds it is representing/reflecting. Over the past one hundred years or so, many exercises have been created to aid the actor in discovering truth and believability in their characters. However, exercises that connect the actor to 'the underground streams' of the unconsciousness and to the 'regions of the soul' or spirit do not readily appear within the known acting methodologies. It is possible the actor, differently trained, might connect more powerfully with that 'other' part of the audience. The meeting place of performer and audience might once again become our sacred place, the shared altered state where certain aspects of ourselves, the inner life, can be once again recognised and explored.

Towards the Future

The spiritual and shamanic approach to theatre is a relatively new one in Australia, although many indigenous peoples and eastern countries have engaged with the spirit for thousands of years. There are enormous resources available to the theatre in search of "real metaphysical inclination."²⁷ They lie in the shamanic practices of indigenous cultures, theosophy and many areas of spiritualism. As a director and teacher of acting I am one of the many searching for practical ways to train and

²⁶ Tacey:1995:7

rehearse actors towards the 'receptive other'. Over the past five years I have worked with students, professional actors and other practitioners who are interested in this development within actor training. The exercises developed during workshops and rehearsal periods during that time are discussed in Chapter Four.²⁸ They involve:

- the use of Chakras (recognised in Buddhist, Hindu and Theosophical literature) represented in Indian Arts, Sculptures, Yoga and Tantra philosophy of India which explain spiritual or divine centres in the human body;
- the use of channelling as experienced by theosophists and spiritualists. Theosophists often experience and witness the phenomenon of channelling. This activity can be engaged in as a rehearsal technique where the actor has an opportunity to surrender to a greater inner force (some might say the higher self) that creates a transformation of the energy within;
- an exploration of shamanism. Exercises based on shamanic trance rituals which alter the individuals' energy states whilst maintaining an awareness. Various exercises involving a type of creative visualisation, 'shamanic' meditation for the actor who 'journeys' to discover and meet their character.

It is no longer enough for an actor to 'just walk out there'. There is more of a responsibility being asked of the actor. That of response-ability to 'connect'

²⁷ Artaud:1977:90,91.

²⁸ The last production these methods were actually used to train actors was *Alabama Rain* written by Heather McCutchen (no relation) and directed by myself at Belvoir

with the audience and to enter into the space of the audience as the audience opens up to the space of the theatre. Many factors influence the state of the audience. Each individual has brought a different energy state into the auditorium. How can this range of energies be met? What is extraordinary about connecting on the inner levels is that it bypasses all the actor's occupation with the mental and external worlds. Actors who have developed their inner energies have the possibility to 'consciously' connect with the energies of the audience, to connect straight through to the deeper states of the being.

It is clearly time to explore the 'receptive other' within us all. Never before in history have we had a language with which to begin to find this other part. Now the feminist voice, the indigenous voice and the new age spiritual voice are steadily establishing themselves in our psyche. Theatre has every reason to embrace this development. The state of the actor reflects the state of the tribe. One would assume this would naturally include the inner state as well as the outer. The silent partner of the actor is spirit:

"Night to his day-that has forever been the fantasy.
Black to his white. Shut out of his system's space,
she is the repressed that ensures the system's
functioning."²⁹

29 Street Theatre, Sydney, in January 1999.
Cixous:1993:67

Chapter One

Progressive Voices of the Past

"I dreamed of creating a spiritual order of actors. Its members were to be men and women of broad and uplifted views, of wide horizons and ideas...who could worship in the theatre as in a temple."³⁰

This chapter attempts to review the ideas and contributions of those whose work has most greatly influenced western actor training over the last one hundred years. The voices reviewed are those of Constantin Stanislavsky, Michael Chekhov, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski.³¹ These practitioners and theorists of theatre have each been influenced by a spiritual voice in one way or another. An important factor to remember is that the literature used and referred to by the theatrical professional involved in actor training has been written by theatre artists as a result of their practical work, not by academics who write usually from the audience perspective.

Constantin Stanislavsky (1863- 1938) is perhaps best known for developing a technique of acting often known as 'method acting' or the 'system'. This technique is still taught in most acting schools today. Most schools in New

30 Stanislavski:1962:537

31 There are of course other director/theorists from the past who worked with different actor training methods such as Meyerhold and Reinhardt. However, the styles of these directors were more of 'puppet masters' than investigators of the spiritual (or beyond the physical, mental and emotional) and therefore aren't cited in this work (Marowitz:1986:88).

York and Los Angeles plus N.I.D.A.³², W.A.A.P.A.³³ the Actor's Centre³⁴ V.C.A.³⁵ in Australia base their work on Stanislavsky's system.

"The very best that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the play. then regardless of his own will he lives the part.....it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively."³⁶

Perhaps the most telling aspect in terms of what has been lost from the legacy of actor training techniques created by the progressive voices of the past is that Stanislavsky called his technique "Spiritual Realism"³⁷ yet nowhere today do we see the word spiritual connected to actor training. If we asked a contemporary student of actor training whether they have engaged in spiritual exercises they would look at us very strangely. However, as I will attempt to portray, the major developers of today's actor training techniques were all driven and informed in their work by spiritual inquiry, acknowledgement and investigation. As Eugenio Barba notes, "Stanislavski got rid of 'soul', 'spirit', 'psyche' and from a certain point on, spoke of 'physical actions'."³⁸ Why this important spiritual aspect of these techniques has not been picked up and developed using today's more developed understanding of the spiritual is a question addressed in Chapter Three of this work, 'Re-Languaging the Inner'.

32 National Institute of Dramatic Arts. Sydney.

33 Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Perth.

34 Founded by Dean Carey (acting teacher NIDA, VCA, WAAPA and USA), Sydney.

35 Victorian College of the Arts. Melbourne.

36 Stanislavsky:1949:13

37 Counsell:1996:25

Stanislavsky

Identifying the main difference between the art of the actor and all other arts as the mastery of inspiration³⁹ Stanislavsky set out to unravel this "jealously guarded secret"⁴⁰ by attempting to identify the elements that would help the actor to "find a conscious path to unconscious creativeness."⁴¹ The first thing he set out to investigate was the removal of tension within the actor.⁴² He saw this as the greatest impediment to the art of acting. In any creative state an actor must have a fully free body, entirely free of muscular tensions which unconsciously take hold of us when we are on the stage and that also in ordinary life shackle us and interfere with our being.⁴³ Addressing the first problem of muscular tension, Stanislavsky developed a series of relaxation exercises which he tested out himself while he was acting on stage. This series of experiments on himself, while confirming that relaxation had an important part to play in an actors' technique actually led him deeper into the psyche of the actor resulting finally in the first principle of his technique "I AM". Which means I exist, I live, I feel and I think in the same way as the character I'm

38 Barba:1995:141

39 Stanislavsky:1962:571

40 *ibid.*

41 *ibid.*

42 Stanislavski:1980:95-111

43 Muscular tension absorbs an enormous amount of inner energy and therefore cripples the actor from achieving the highest truth on stage. If the actor can develop in themselves the habit of freeing the body from superfluous tensions then they remove one of the most substantial blocks to creativity (Stanislavski 1980:95-111).

presenting on stage does. "I AM" is the result of the desire of truth. Interestingly, "I AM" is also the key phrase of the Theosophists,⁴⁴ who under the leadership of Madam Blavatsky were developing their spiritual beliefs at the same time in Russia.⁴⁵ The connection between the rise of Theosophy, the knowledge of eastern religious practice and Stanislavsky's acting system becomes clearer as we discover the great Russian artist Nicholas Roerich, who designed costumes and sets for Stanislavsky,⁴⁶ was also a leading Theosophist and whose wife founded the Agni Yoga Society in 1920.⁴⁷

Mel Gordon in his book on the Stanislavsky Technique⁴⁸ attributes the very founding of Stanislavsky's system to his meeting and nine year relationship with Leopold Sulerzhitsky.⁴⁹ Not only was 'Suler' well versed in "Eastern-influenced religious practices" but he also informed Stanislavsky about yoga, meditation and the nature of Prana, "a Hindu concept of the invisible life force that streams through all living things."⁵⁰ Stanislavsky

44 The Theosophical Society is a worldwide association dedicated to practical realisation of the oneness of all life and to independent spiritual search. It was founded in New York City in 1875 by Helena P. Blavatsky, Henry S. Olcott, William Q. Judge and others. Blavatsky (1831-1891) is the primary force behind the modern theosophical movement.

45 Blavatsky addressed the question "What is a theosophist?" and replied "one need not necessarily recognise the existence of any special God or a deity. One need but worship the spirit of living nature, and try to identify oneself with it" (The Theosophist:1879: 6).

46 Roerich, *The Life & Art of a Russian Master*, 1989:101

47 *ibid.*, p.107,108

48 Gordon:1988

49 *ibid.*, p.30

50 *ibid.*, p.31

immediately saw the parallel between Prana and the Creative State of Mind. Sulerzhitsky "instructed the actors in yogic relaxation techniques."⁵¹ He believed there were three main areas which helped one to acquire the Creative State of Mind. These were Relaxation, Concentration and Naiveté. "Together, Stanislavsky and Suler laid down these basic building blocks of the System".⁵² The actors were encouraged to communicate via 'radiation', sending and receiving 'arrows' of intention, attempting to silently communicate their thoughts. ⁵³ The first production to use these acting techniques as taught by Stanislavsky and Suler was *A Month in the Country* which proved the method so successfully it became part of the Moscow Art Theatre's Training.

For some reason known only to Stanislavsky, the obvious influence of eastern religious and spiritual teachings and Theosophy has not been clearly acknowledged in the construction of his acting techniques. Perhaps they were not acceptable forms of belief or knowledge at the time. Although Stanislavsky referred to the word 'spirit' almost constantly in his writing, there are very few references to what he means by the use of this word:

"Nine tenths of the labour of an actor, nine tenths of everything lies in beginning to live and feel the role spiritually."⁵⁴

51 *ibid.*, p.37

52 *ibid.*, p.38

53 *ibid.*

54 Stanislavsky:1962:568

It seems Sulerzhitsky was not only the leader of the First Studio created by Stanislavsky to study the Stanislavsky System but was also the spiritual inspiration behind Stanislavsky's 'system'.⁵⁵ Suler also taught the actors exercises of 'radiating the soul', yoga and meditation, dreaming of the day when "the actor's pure soul could connect directly with the spectator's".⁵⁶

When Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler claimed Stanislavsky's 'system' in the 1930's it seems that the entirety of "Spiritual Realism" was lost and the 'method' was construed. The important group processes and the spiritual training exercises were not adopted as part of the 'method'. Rather the psychological bent of the time pervaded Stanislavsky's system and the spiritual aspect was forgotten. Robert Lewis in an interview with Charles Marowitz talked about the 'Method' and the fact that directors like Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg were only interested in psychology, people's feelings and relationships. Lewis goes on to criticise those directors and the Actors' Studio for their very limited definition of truth which revolved only around the actors' feelings.⁵⁷

"It seems to me, the Method has crippled more actors than it ever helped."⁵⁸

Although certainly successful as an actor training methodology, the 'method' was constrained by the thinking of the time. The consequence for

55 *ibid.*, p.531 & Gordon:1981:81,82

56 Gordon 1981:34,35, 38

57 Marowitz:1986:76,77

58 Robert Lewis in interview 1985 (Marowitz:1986:76).

the actor was on one hand a greater depth on the emotional scale and on the other a further loss of the sacred and spiritual. Charles Marowitz writes:

"You have to indict all of the people who put into practice only one portion of it (the Method).....they got stuck in the thirties...you know they're still doing their emotional memories and private moments and sense memory and all the rest of that stuff, and here we are in the eighties, a half - century later. Harold (Clurman) felt that Lee Strasberg had "ghettoised" the American actor."⁵⁹

Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky spent many years creating a system of acting which drew quite clearly much of its inspiration from eastern forms of spirituality and philosophy. Sulerzhitsky trained the actors initially (over a period of 2-3 years) on a large plot of land by the Black Sea (purchased by Stanislavsky). This period instilled a connection to nature within the actors as well as their daily meditations and yoga practice.⁶⁰ The Moscow Art Theatre actors were trained in a far more holistic way than the actors using the American 'Method'. Why did Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler ignore these other elements? As Eugenio Barba writes:

"All these principles...are means to remove what is obviously the body's daily aspect, in order to avoid it being only a human body condemned to resemble itself, to present and represent only itself".⁶¹

Does it matter that in all this effort to create the most intricate and advanced training techniques we seem to have lost the aspect of the spiritual, the connection to the 'gods', to the spirit in all of us, to nature and the

59 Marowitz:1986:79

60 Stanislavsky:1962: 538, 539

61 Barba:1995:32

universe? Tragically this was not carried over or developed by Strasberg or Adler. However, the recognition and development of the spiritual within actor training continued with Stanislavsky's brilliant pupil and nephew of Anton Chekhov,⁶² Michael Chekhov.

Chekhov

Michael Chekhov joined the First Studio of the Moscow Art theatre in 1912. The First Studio, under the leadership of Sulerzhitsky, was set up by Stanislavsky as a site of experimentation and actor training. Here he developed under the influences of Stanislavsky, Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov. However his breakthrough as an actor and developer of actor training techniques occurred during his period of exile in Berlin.⁶³ His first role there was as a clown 'Skid' in "Aristen" directed by Max Reinhardt. It was during a performance of "Aristen" that Chekhov first experienced a connection with 'higher' consciousness.

"As one part of Chekhov's consciousness watched and gave commands to the character, another part of his consciousness performed as the character."⁶⁴

This experience of two separate "I's", the lower and the higher, at work within the individual catalysed Chekhov's ideas about acting. He realised

⁶² Stanislavsky directed Anton Chekhov's "The Seagull" to acclaim. For the Moscow Art Theatre, Chekhov's well known plays include "Uncle Vanya", "The Cherry Orchard" and the "The Three Sisters".

⁶³ After learning of his impending arrest in Moscow for his idealist, non-Marxist beliefs, Chekhov fled with his wife to Berlin for 7 years (1928 - 1935) (Black:1997:21).

⁶⁴ Black:1987:22

that the “higher I”⁶⁵ was the part of the self that should be engaged with by the actor while the “lower I”⁶⁶ drove the ego and passions usually resulting in over passionate acting. It wasn’t until 1935/6 that Chekhov became recognised in America for his brilliance as an actor. The Chekhov Theatre Studio opened in Dartington Hall in 1936 with many similar aims to that of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre where Chekhov had begun his training twenty four years ago.

The relationship between Chekhov’s concept of the “higher I” and the “higher self”⁶⁷ in Theosophical teachings is an interesting one. Lendley Black addresses this similarity: “This concept of the ‘higher I’ seems to be closely linked to Chekhov’s belief in Anthroposophy.”⁶⁸ While discussing his views about one’s ability to know Christ in a higher state of consciousness, Chekhov calls this consciousness the “higher I”.⁶⁹ Black then goes on to draw the conclusion that the higher state of consciousness reached in a religious sense is similar to the higher state of consciousness reached by actors when creatively inspired.⁷⁰

65 ibid.

66 ibid.

67 “For the sixth element I shall include what in previous discussions we called the voice of our other, higher self: that is our attitude as artists toward the characters or the types of people we have to create and present on the stage” (Chekhov:1984:105).

68 A spiritual Science developed by Rudolf Steiner. “As a practising Anthroposophist, Mikhail Chekhov was involved with Anthroposophy both as a world conception and as a spiritual science” (Black:1987:7,9).

69 Black 1987:82

70 ibid

Chekhov was deeply inspired by Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy, and used Steiner's system of Eurythmy as a part of his own acting system. Eurythmy, also termed the science of visible speech, consisted of spiritual dances, attempting to transform sound and colour into movement. Chekhov introduced Eurythmy in his teaching method to make actors aware of the qualities of speech. E.g. vowels are more intimate and suitable for expressing cantabile, spiritual themes and intimate experiences whereas consonants are more dramatic and earthy.⁷¹ Chekhov also used the elemental ideas of Steiner in his movement exercises: Moulding-earth, Flowing-water, Flying-air, Radiating-air. These four elements are also very important within Shamanic training, although explored in far more depth. It should also be noted that Chekhov was a:

"strong believer in yoga and felt that there was something in the practice of yoga that would be of great use to the actor. He experimented with ways to use it in rehearsals and performances."⁷²

One of Chekhov's techniques for actors is a method to refine the imagination and deepen incorporation. The actor questions the image of the character in her mind's eye as she would a friend. Chekhov maintains that answers will be forthcoming if the imagination is flexible and courageous. Instead of guessing what the characters' response might be to a given situation or circumstance, the actor observes the character responding to that situation. Absolute trust comes as a result of constant use and total belief in this method. The essence of this technique is that the image rehearses for the actor. Asking leading questions is the means by which the

71 Chekhov:1991:75

72 Black:1987:7

actor drives the image, placing the actor's body into the imaginary body. Lifting the imaginary arm with the real, (e.g. the character's arm is long and lean,) the actor rehearses with this new arm until it is long and lean, then continues with the rest of the body. As the actor incorporates the imaginary body they will also establish the 'centre' of the character's body. The centre is described by Chekhov as the 'watchtower' of the body⁷³ and once the actor connects with the centre of the character, all else will fall into place. Two aspects that separate Chekhov's work most clearly from others are the use of Imagination and the notion of the "higher I". Through the use of Imagination, the actor is encouraged through intense focus to imagine the character, internally and externally, and to ask questions of the character. This key concept replaced Stanislavsky's Emotion Memory or Recall and introduced the actor to the world beyond the conscious. Most creative visualisation techniques today draw on similar exercises, eg. seeing yourself as successful in your mind. The use of Eurythmy by Chekhov engaged the actor's imagination past the senses into the realms of 'radiation'⁷⁴ and focused energy work:

"Marrying the inner truth and emotional depth of Stanislavsky's system with the beauty and spiritual impact of Steiner's work became Chekhov's obsessive quest."⁷⁵

The second key aspect of Chekhov's work, the "higher I", potentially takes the actor into realms of a spiritual 'at oneness' with their part and ideally the audience. Listening to the 'voice' speaking from the audience was an important part of the training. Have we lost this notion? The work of

73 Chekhov:1991:102

74 A further development of the work on radiation initiated by Suler and Stanislavsky.

75 Chekhov:1991:16

Michael Chekhov always had at its base the search for a greater level of communion with the audience.⁷⁶ Most importantly in Chekhov's system the use of logical reasoning is always inferior to the use of imagination.⁷⁷ Michael Chekhov in his address to the Drama Society of Hollywood in 1955 stated:

"Deep within ourselves are buried tremendous creative powers and abilities. But they remain unused so long as we deny them....They lie dormant because we do not open the doors to our hidden vaults and fearlessly bring them to the surface."⁷⁸

Artaud

Along with Stanislavsky and Michael Chekhov (1891- 1955), Antonin Artaud (1896- 1948) worked to bring consciousness of soul and spirit back to the theatre. Perhaps Artaud's most insightful writing on this matter is the following from his book, *The Theatre and it's Double*:

"The question then, for the theater, is to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression.....But all this can be of no use unless behind this effort there is some kind of real metaphysical inclination, an appeal to certain unhabitual ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted. These ideas which touch on Creation, Becoming and Chaos, are all of a cosmic order and furnish a primary notion of a domain from which the theatre is entirely alien."⁷⁹

76 Chekhov:1991:xvi

77 Black:1987:97

78 Chekhov:1953:17

79 Artaud:1994:90-91

The terms 'cosmic order'⁸⁰ and 'metaphysical inclinations'⁸¹ suggest a movement of forces seemingly untapped by the theatre of his time. As mentioned, Artaud was concerned over the lack of connection to soul and saw this as a huge setback for the actor. "Belief in the soul's flowing substantiality is essential to the actor's craft....To know there is a physical outlet for the soul permits him (sic) to journey down into that soul".⁸² Yet Artaud's cry for the soul to be recognised through the voice of theatre, has still to find its place. There are many interpretations and definitions of soul from eastern to western religions and philosophies. David Abram⁸³ suggests that the word soul has its roots in ancient Greek and Latin where the same word in those languages meant 'soul', 'breath', 'wind', 'anima' and 'air'. He then joins parallels with the Sanskrit word 'atman' which was used for soul, air and breath and suggests that throughout many cultures soul equals breath or air and this is what fills us with a life force and unites us all.⁸⁴ Artaud's use of the word soul calls in stronger imagery of a denied presence which could possibly be interpreted as the spirit. A more religious understanding of soul might put that same life force into a construct with a deity at the head who more or less controls or 'owns' our souls. The main point is to consider the 'at oneness' aspect of the historical roots of soul, the connectedness to a source of all life. The word soul represents freedom

80 ibid.

81 ibid.

82 Artaud:1997:90

83 David Abram Ph.D. is an ecologist and philosopher. He wrote *The Spell of the Sensuous* in 1996 from which these references to soul were taken.

from the lower states of humanity and an aspiration to higher understandings.

Writing about his experience of Balinese theatre, Artaud suggests that the metaphysical presence that “baffles our western concept of theatre”⁸⁵ is one that reveals matter, teaching us “the metaphysical identity of abstract and concrete.”⁸⁶

“....theatre is rather
this crucible of fire and real meat where
by an anatomical trampling of bone, limbs and
syllables
bodies are renewed.”⁸⁷

Artaud is almost asking for a shamanic death to take place within the theatre. A death that will strip us down to our soul.

Peter Brook writes that Artaud “...was always speaking of a complete way of life, of a theatre in which the activity of the actor and the activity of the spectator were driven by the same desperate need”.⁸⁸ Entertainment might or might not be considered a common “driving need”⁸⁹ but perhaps the questions about who we are, a desire for meditation and reflection on our human state, a meeting between the actors and the speculating actors

84 Abram:1996:231,238

85 Artaud:1977:39

86 *ibid.*, p.41

87 Hirschman:1956:169

88 Brook:1990:6

89 *ibid.*

(spectators) touches on the edge of Artaud's concept of "driving need"⁹⁰. Brook also states "...the theatre is based on a particular human characteristic, which is the need at times to be in a new intimate relationship with one's fellow men."⁹¹ The idea of a 'new intimate relationship' is an interesting one. It suggests theatre is capable of a dynamic between both audience and actors which invites an intimate experience not available elsewhere. If this was so, one would have to wonder why theatre is not more popular. Is it possible that theatre will only appeal to a limited populace who are interested in this kind of intimate new experience? The sharing of the space and the altering of the space are realms into which both the actor and spectator step when they arrive at the site of theatre. Mark Fortier comments: "Derrida concludes that no theatre can be what Artaud proposes"⁹² simply because he believes that "Western theater has been separated from the force of its essence."⁹³ This suggests that the ideas of 'gods' and what is sacred have been dropped from Western theatre rendering it immobile and disconnected from the original reasons for its' existence.

This liminal space of theatre involves many transactions between actors and audience - a sense of an otherness within us all which is connected through the act of theatre within the shared space. There is a place for soul

90 *ibid.*

91 Brook 1989:147

92 Fortier:1997:44

93 Derrida: 1978:233

and spirit within this site. Nigel Rasmussen from Odin Teatret observes "Otherness is our meeting place."⁹⁴ 'Otherness' also brings with it a concept of another part of ourselves, an inner part, unknown and known, recognisable intuitively and through the senses, a metaphysical attachment to the known self. Within this complex model, the sacred altered space lies in wait. Somewhere in between the actor, the audience and the 'otherness' of self is this realm of spirit awaiting recognition. The awareness of the actor of these engaging metaphysical energies present in the shared space has yet to be clarified by present western training techniques. Jerzy Grotowski was one of several practitioners who, with his actors, explored the metaphysics of this shared space.

Grotowski

"We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs and who really wishes, through confrontation, to analyse himself (sic)."⁹⁵

Although on a nearly religious path of actor training, Grotowski's approach was less embracing of the inner dimensions and more focused on the act of ritual than either Stanislavsky or Chekhov. In his own words he defines the 'holy actor' as one "who, through his art, climbs upon the stake and performs an act of self sacrifice".⁹⁶ Grotowski began to think in terms of "another hitherto unknown, form of art beyond the traditional division of onlooker and active person creator and recipient."⁹⁷ Grotowski's paratheatrical work took participants from cities and brought them to

94 Barba:1986:54

95 Grotowski:1975:40

96 Grotowski:1984:43

97 Mitter:1995:102

remote areas to work with Grotowski's actors, performing actions that involved discovering and revealing hidden personal themes. Many of the physical actions - running through the forest at night, sudden immersion in water, dances around fire, group chanting, etc. are very like those in initiation rites.

Why was Grotowski drawn to these exercises for his actors? The International Research Theatre Group KISS also explored similar rituals in the search for material and actor training methods. For example, one such ritual in preparation for the 24 hour show based on Dante's Divine Comedy involved the actors spending a 24 hour period (with no break) building and worshipping effigies of the 7 deadly sins. This ritual served to alter the actors' waking state of perception and creativity which often resulted in a dream-like trance state where they drew on resources deep within that had previously remained untapped. The difference between the aims of these rituals is that Grotowski was searching for a state of the actor that was her/his 'true' state, the state that exists past the roles, identities and masks created by our cultures. According to Mitter, "It is the objective of Grotowski's theatre to destroy social roles so that actor and spectator alike can achieve a true self realisation,"⁹⁸ whereas the KISS actors were entering into altered states and drawing on the creativity in these states with which to create material and performances. If certain boundaries of culture, self and other were transcended as a result of this training, this was an added aspect and often not identified at the time as such.⁹⁹ Grotowski's style may

⁹⁸ Mitter:1992:82

⁹⁹ I was a member of the Theatre Group KISS based in Holland for two years and took part in these exercises often experiencing 'altered states' as a result.

be described as one of isolation and control, as witnessed in many of the oriental performing arts. In Grotowski's theatre however, the actors do not serve the artform, rather, the art form serves the actor. Schechner in his book *Between Theatre & Anthropology* discusses Grotowski's work with concern for the actor who, after this training become "disenabled".¹⁰⁰ Grotowski did not leave the actor a road home after the training. As Schechner observes:

"People are drawn very deeply into highly personal work - into the 'breakdown' phase of the workshop, or the 'separation/ordeal' phase of initiation - but they are not then 'reconstructed'."¹⁰¹

Lisa Wolford in her article "Action"¹⁰² notes the observation made by Peter Brook (1987) that Grotowski is looking for:

"something which existed in the past but has been forgotten over the centuries. That is that one of the vehicles which allows humanity to have access to another level of perception is to be found in the art of the performer."¹⁰³

Wolford brings light to Grotowski's recent work and his concern with performance as a means to give form and structure to the inner search, likening the process to that of certain orders of monks who used the making of music or the making of liqueurs to provide a practical structure and focus for their inner development.

100 Schechner:1989:255

101 *ibid.*

102 Wolford "Action", in *The Drama Review* Winter 1996

103 *ibid.*, p.135

The current work (1986 on) of Grotowski's Workcenter, Pondetera, Italy is focused on: "Art as Vehicle", the development of performance structures around songs from African and Afro-Caribbean lines of tradition.¹⁰⁴ Grotowski sees this work identifying and concentrating on:

"actions related to very ancient songs which traditionally served ritual purposes, and so can have a direct impact on, so to say the head, heart and body of the doers."¹⁰⁵

The performing structure functions as an objective support that will assist the actor in what Grotowski terms an "itinerary in verticality."¹⁰⁶ Here we see a direct relation to the shamanic use of the previously unacknowledged 'forces' or energies round the actor and between the actor and audience.

Wolford states:

"Verticality - we can see this phenomenon in categories of energy: heavy but organic energies (linked to the forces of life, to instincts, to sensuality) and other energies, more subtle. The question of verticality means to pass from a so-called coarse level - in a certain sense, an 'everyday level' - to a level of energy more subtle or even toward the higher connection."¹⁰⁷

The concept of verticality is not dissimilar to how the chakras work and the nature of the astral body. The astral body¹⁰⁸ consists of seven layers of coarse to fine material and the chakras move from coarser energy at the root to finer energy at the crown. An actor working with either the chakras or

104 At the time of this writing Grotowski died June 1999.

105 Thibaudat:1995:29

106 Wolford:1996:136

107 Richards "At work with Grotowski on Physical Actions" p.125

108 Discussed at greater length in Chapter Four of this thesis.

the astral body would certainly be experiencing progressions through detectably different levels and grades of energy.

Chakras

Chakra is a sanskrit word meaning 'wheel' - a focus where forces and energies interplay.¹⁰⁹ These spinning wheels of energy are doors to the inner worlds, doors to understanding the inner life. Grotowski wanted to investigate the innate physical power known in the Hindu tradition as "kundalini", the sleeping energy at the base of the spine. He believed that the awakened state was necessary both in life and the performing arts.¹¹⁰

Grotowski also recognised the enormous potential of theatre to alter the states of perception, awareness and self-realisation of the audience. He saw theatre as transformative for both actor and audience:

"If the actor, by setting himself a challenge publicly challenges others...reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration."¹¹¹

Through intensive questioning of the actors about their true selves Grotowski placed the actors into self reflective modes of awareness beyond an everyday self knowledge. Sometimes using song as a vehicle of expression he would suggest "sing your name....evoke this Joseph. Who is he, this stranger?"¹¹² Known for his somewhat ruthless approach towards

109 Sanskrit was the classical language of the Brahmans (the highest of the 4 castes in India), some of the Brahmans were initiated into the mystery schools. The chakras are wheel-like vortices in the etheric body (Judith:1993:1).

110 Lendra:1995:153

111 Grotowski;1969:34

112 *ibid.*, p.170

extending the actor beyond their limits one of his audition exercises required the actor to forward roll for hours upon hours with no break.¹¹³ He created many ritual tasks for the actor involving gruelling physical challenges that would serve to alter the actor's waking senses in a very real way. James Waites¹¹⁴ in an article on Grotowski in *RealTime*¹¹⁵ related details of being used as a human plough, made to stand in freezing water in a large tub while standing on pineapple tops. Waites was also repeatedly hit by a woman trying to goad him into a fight which he refused to engage in (Waites had been selected for a Grotowski workshop in Armidale N.S.W.) These were all 'tests' of endurance and very punishing ways to take the actor into altered states of reality. When Grotowski asked "In what conditions is it possible to achieve interhuman fullness?"¹¹⁶ it seems strange that he did not consider the effects of meditation, eastern religious practices and shamanism. For thousands of years exercises have been developed to assist the individual in developing a 'higher state' or a 'oneness' with the forces or 'god', yet Grotowski is concerned with developing the actors' state into "the one who watches and the one who acts...the recipient and the creator"¹¹⁷ - to create with the consciousness of both audience and actor. This is precisely what Chekhov discovered when he observed himself on stage from the audience perspective and then developed the notion of the "higher I" as a result. To create within the

113 This information came from Lindy Davies (now Dean of Drama at V.C.A. Melbourne) who auditioned for Grotowski's workshop in the early 70's.

114 A Sydney journalist/theatre critic.

115 A Sydney Arts magazine.ed.Keith Gallasch. April - May 1999:7

116 Schechner:1989:254

117 ibid.

actor a state of the “higher I” is different to the actor being pushed via superhuman physical training to an altered state.

Grotowski's focus on the self of the actor rather than the identity of the character distinguished his work from Chekhov and Stanislavsky. In fact, of the three, he was probably the closest to seeking the purely spiritual within the actor. The fact that his work developed over the past twenty years to a point where the audience was no longer required or desirable begs the debate as to whether this was 'theatre' or 'therapy'. A debate I will leave for another time and which, I believe, Rustom Bharucha in his chapter entitled 'Goodbye Grotowski' in chapter two of his book *Theatre and the World*¹¹⁸ deals with well. However Grotowski's searching for this 'enlightened' state is reminiscent of a spiritual disciple. Citing no 'god' in particular as the ideal or example, the actor went forward into the unknown regions with no aid from the ancient structures developed for such journeys. As a result, no particular outcome was outlined as a part of the art form and Grotowski's actor was left somewhere on the path of the inner. When commenting on the difficulty of leaving thought behind and just 'being' in his address to the Kosciuszko Foundation in 1979 Grotowski stated, "The tree is our teacher. It does not ask itself such questions."¹¹⁹ It's puzzling how Grotowski could avoid referring to any eastern religions or shamanic approaches as they have, for thousands of years experienced the 'being' of a tree, of other animals, of higher consciousness and of inner light. Grotowski was influenced by Kathakali training and hatha yoga,¹²⁰

118 Bharucha: 1993:42-53

119 Mitter:1992:88

120 Schechner:1989:227,8

yet he only 'borrowed' specific physical exercises and not the informing spirituality behind the practice.

Summary

Clearly a need exists within the theatrical psyche to investigate, explore and confront those parts of us which bring us into commonality with each other. We need to be reminded of our connection to forces beyond ourselves, the gods within and the gods above. The story the actors are telling is one part of the exchange, the many unseen energies that exchange, converse and move us, are the other. "...The actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals themselves.....must be able to express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality."¹²¹ Somewhere in all of this: Artaud's call for metaphysical inclinations,¹²² Grotowski's demand for the 'total act', Stanislavsky's search for truth and Chekhov's address to the higher self of the actor,¹²³ lies the question of energy beyond the self.

"In every role, at every show the actor must create not just the conscious but also the unconscious part of the life of the human spirit....only a tenth of our life is lived on a conscious plane."¹²⁴

How do we address this 'energy beyond the self' in our theatre? So many voices of the past like those mentioned in this introduction have questioned and searched for ways to shed light on this ethereal state, this 'phantom limb' hanging from the body of humankind, forgotten and

121 Grotowski:1968:29,35

122 Artaud:1994:90-91

123 Chekhov:1984:105)

124 Stanislavsky:1962:166,167

dislocated. Perhaps Artaud best summed up this state in his final performance text: "To Have Done With the Judgement of God"¹²⁵ where questions about consciousness and knowledge are pursued and answered with more unanswerable questions. It all dead-ends in a scene in which God turns up on an autopsy table as a dissected organ taken from the defective corpse of mankind. An interesting metaphor for the loss of the spiritual and sacred in so much of our existence. Despite the inspiring efforts of the above practitioners and others such as Schechner and Barba, our theatre training contains only the 'phantom limb' of the spiritual. Very few actors graduating from a western actor training school would be schooled in the ancient arts of the spirit: yoga, meditation, chakras, channelling and shamanic ritual. If the actor reflects us in all our complexities why has this entire region been so ignored? Our theatre has lost the 'sacred' space that so many indigenous and Asian performances and rituals have retained. Surely we can look to these sources and re-learn what the 'sacred' is for us today in our culture. By approaching our theatre with this respect and connectedness to the 'receptive other' we begin the journey of the past, present and future rites of performance as 'mediums' on behalf of the 'tribe' once again.

125 Artaud was commissioned in 1947 by Ferdinand Pouey, the director of dramatic and literary broadcasts for French Radio. Although it was actually recorded in the studios of the French Radio at the end of 1947 and scheduled to be broadcast at 10:45 PM on February 2, 1948, the broadcast was cancelled at the last minute by the director of French Radio, Vladimir Porche. Citing Artaud's vicious and obscene anti-American and anti-Catholic pronouncements as something that the French radio audience could do without, he upheld this censorship in the face of widespread support from many culturally prominent figures including Jean Cocteau, Jean Louis Barrault, Rene Clair and Paul Eluard. Artaud died a little over a month later, profoundly disappointed over the rejection of the work. It was not broadcast over the airwaves until thirty years later.

Chapter Two

The Ancient Voices of Today - Re-Assessing the Sacred

"Culture is a story told around a fire. It is the conversation between the young and old...the link between your experience and mine"¹²⁶.

Culture has many definitions stemming from many disciplines, often formulated to suit the discipline referring to it. Theatre has yet to define culture as significantly as anthropology, sociology or psychology. The above quote by Leonardo Shapiro suits the theatrical form more than most, as it deals with story telling and sharing. With this concept of culture in mind, it's possible for theatre to influence culture as the stories of a culture usually reflect the morals, mores, behaviours and values of that society. The place of the 'gods' in any culture's story telling practices is usually an external concept supported by the established religion of that culture. To discover the 'gods' of our culture in Australia one would not look at our theatre.

Who are the 'gods' in our western theatre? Who do the actors commune with when carrying out the act of theatre? In Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, the notions of existence, birth and death are peeled back existentially revealing "that there has never been an origin."¹²⁷ He speaks about the 'representation'¹²⁸ of life by Western theatre rather than a 'primordial and privileged site'¹²⁹ where imitation is

126 Shapiro:1991:39

127 Derrida:1995:232

128 *ibid.*, p.234

129 *ibid.*, p.234

destroyed and we are once again connected with transcendental principles. Derrida, via Artaud's work, is questioning the place of theatre which merely reflects, represents and imitates¹³⁰ life, imprisoning actors and spectators alike in the hands of the text and the 'author-god.'¹³¹ Derrida quotes both Artaud and Freud in their references to the power of dream imagery and text as desirable states for the language of the stage,¹³² linking the state of dream to the transcendental. Within Derrida's text lie the keys to "the Closure of Representation"¹³³ and the redemption of Western theatre. This involves the recreation of the metaphysical and transcendental connections through the remembering of dream states and the penetration of the forces of our origin, presumably our 'gods'.¹³⁴ Antonin Artaud states:

"The theater is a passionate overflowing
a frightful transfer of forces
from body
to body.
This transfer cannot be reproduced twice.
Nothing more impious than the system of the Balinese which consists,
after having produced this transfer one time,
instead of seeking another,
in resorting to a system of particular enchantments
in order to deprive astral photography of the gestures thus
obtained."¹³⁵

Thus we enter into the realms of dreams, rituals and the place of 'forces' within the theatre. Many notable theorists including Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba have attested to the "irradiation", "expressive

130 "Is not the most naive form of representation *mimesis*"? (Derrida:1995:234)

131 *ibid.*, p.237

132 "It is not a question of suppressing the spoken language, but of giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams" (Artaud:1977:111).

133 Derrida:1995:232

134 *ibid.*, p.248

135 Artaud 1946 in Derrida 1995:250

metaphysics"¹³⁶ and "a quality of energy"¹³⁷ of eastern or Asian performance presumably as compared with western performance. When Stanislavsky's 'spiritual realism' was converted to the American 'method' and we lost the chapter on yoga, meditation and ritual as techniques for the training of actors, did we lose our connection to these 'forces' then? As the focus became one more of psychology and emotional archaeology did we lose the interest and perspective of the soul? Ritual certainly remained an area of interest although not necessarily connected with energies of a higher nature or source. Could this be the separation Derrida was referring to? Has the sense of the 'sacred' within the ritual of performance been preserved in eastern theatre and removed in western theatre? It's useful and perhaps necessary at this point to enter into a discussion of the concepts of 'religion' and the 'sacred'.

Mircea Eliade states that the sacred "...is the experience of a reality and the source of an awareness of existing in the world."¹³⁸ Whilst this is a very open interpretation of sacred, it also invites us into the quest for 'the source of awareness' which is the quest facing many shamans and spiritual people throughout the world. Standard academic definitions of religion tend to focus on either the superhuman or sacred features of religious worlds.

In an approach to defining religion that can be traced back to the nineteenth-century anthropologist, E. B. Tylor,¹³⁹ religion is essentially an

¹³⁶ "Therefore we must create word, gesture and expressive metaphysics, in order to rescue theatre from its human, psychological prostration" (Artaud: 1977:69).

¹³⁷ Barba:1995:15

¹³⁸ Eliade *Ordeal by Labyrinth* 1959:154

¹³⁹ Bryan Rennie. website ;
<http://www.westminster.edu/staff/brennie/eliade/introduction.htm>

engagement with superhuman transcendence. In these terms, religion is a set of beliefs and practices in relation to spiritual, supernatural, or superhuman beings that rise above and go beyond the ordinary level of human existence. In another approach to defining religion, which can be traced back to the work of the sociologist Emile Durkheim,¹⁴⁰ religion is a set of beliefs and practices related to a sacred focus that unifies a human community. From this perspective, religion invests life with sacred meaning and power through beliefs in myths and doctrines, through the practices of ritual and ethics, through personal experience, and through forms of social organisation.

Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane*¹⁴¹ discusses the very elusive qualities of the word 'sacred' without however, suggesting a constant definition. Eliade repeatedly identifies the sacred as the real, yet he states clearly that "the sacred is a structure of human consciousness."¹⁴² This suggests a social construction of both the sacred and of reality. Yet the sacred is identified as the source of significance, meaning, power and being, and its manifestations as hierophanies,¹⁴³ kratophanies,¹⁴⁴ or ontophanies accordingly (appearances of the holy, of power, or of being).

Corresponding to the suggested ambiguity of the sacred itself is the ambiguity of its manifestations. Eliade does state that believers for whom the hierophany is a revelation of the sacred must be prepared by their

140 ibid.

141 ibid.

142 Eliade 1969:i; 1978: xiii

143 “To designate the *act of manifestation* of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany*” (Eliade:1959:11).

144 “manifestations of power” (Eliade:1963:14).

experience, including their traditional religious background, before they can apprehend it. To others the sacred tree, for example, remains simply a tree. This is an indispensable element of Eliade's analysis that any phenomenal entity could be perceived as an hierophany with the appropriate preparation. He argues that in order to become whole or attain the "ideal of humanity"¹⁴⁵ we construct a 'superhuman' level in which, in order to access, we must leave behind "natural humanity".¹⁴⁶ So we need to create these rituals, rites and ordeals in order to become part of 'divine' action.¹⁴⁷ The approaches to these acts invariably become sacred because they are part of a journey towards the 'higher self' or 'God.'

The connection to theatre and ritual here is an obvious one, further underlining the roots or 'essence' of theatre while at the same time revealing its loss. The fact that the sacred is also often 'taboo' to different groups is a more interesting observation raised by Eliade. The element of power being made manifest as an integral aspect of the sacred being made manifest places the sacred act, ritual or object into an arena where veneration and fear also emerge.¹⁴⁸ In many cultures, what is considered 'sacred' is also considered out of bounds or forbidden. "He longs to go beyond it (his natural profane state) and yet cannot wholly leave it."¹⁴⁹ Has theatre forsaken the 'sacred' in order to become 'commercially viable'? David Tacey addresses the loss of the sacred within Australian culture in his book *The Edge of the Sacred*, in which he states:

145 Eliade 1959:187

146 *ibid.*

147 *ibid.*

148 Eliade 1963:14/15

149 *ibid.*, p.18

"We must now respectfully throw off the secular iron mask and move to a new level of development. The sacred lies in wait for our approach.....If the human ego can learn to live in the presence of the sacred without being overwhelmed by it then a genuine spirituality can emerge from the creative interaction of humanity and the sacred."¹⁵⁰

By reclaiming the sacred, theatre can embrace a 'genuine spirituality' rather than fear of the unknown or 'taboo ridden' rituals. An education towards this way of being has already begun with writers such as Tacey, however, to bring the notion of 'sacred' within the spiritual back into the theatre, we need to address the training of the representatives, the story tellers, the actors. Tacey addresses the seeming lack of spirituality in our culture, concerned that when 'religious vision is lost, the people perish':¹⁵¹

Eliade's work also illuminated the idea of an age-long search for meaning where the sacred is more than an idea, it is an experience where the world means something: "it lives and speaks to the religious person."¹⁵² He connects the idea of 'religious man' to an "infinite series of experiences that could be termed cosmic."¹⁵³ Although a 'religious man' to Eliade included anyone who acknowledged a 'god' in their life, this loose definition was still limited to more traditional religions, east and west. However, Eliade's ideas on the sacred move us towards a clearer understanding of constructions of meaning via religion as opposed to the existential dilemma of the non-religious.¹⁵⁴ Within this he suggests that "the 'irreligious' still behave

150 Tacey 1995 :6

151 *ibid.*, p.8

152 Eliade 1959:165

153 *ibid.*, p.170

154 *ibid.*, p.14-18

religiously"¹⁵⁵ without being conscious of the fact that they are conditioned by myths, rituals and taboos from religious ceremonies of other eras.

All of this serves to support the premise behind the re-development of the sacred in the theatre which is the fact that we, as human beings have constructed our meaning through religious rituals for thousands of years. If theatre is to remain meaningful to us it must reconsider these roots in the light of today's changing views and interpretations of meaningful religious and spiritual experiences. It would be very difficult to identify these changing views without identifying the challenge to the patriarchal voice by the feminist and indigenous voices. As David Tacey notes:

"If the human ego can learn to live in the presence of the sacred without being overwhelmed by it, then a genuine spirituality can emerge from the creative interaction of humanity and the sacred."¹⁵⁶

Tacey identifies "secular humanism"¹⁵⁷ as a product of the ego which is determined in western society by the "patriarchal hero".¹⁵⁸ If the ego is determined by the patriarchal voice then spirituality could be seen to be framed today by the voice of the 'receptive other' which includes the indigenous voice with the feminist voice. In his discussion of the 'hero' and the ensuing decline of the patriarchal values, Tacey suggests that:

"As the masculinist pubs, churches, convents and barber shops go broke or close down in Australian cities, new age bookshops and 'awareness centres' are popping up everywhere."¹⁵⁹

155 *ibid.*, p.205

156 Tacey 1995:6

157 *ibid.*, p.186

158 *ibid.*

159 *ibid.*, p.192

Tacey addresses the growth of interest by the general public in “non-patriarchal esoteric arts and sciences”¹⁶⁰ as a sign that the idea of “feminine mystery”¹⁶¹ is arriving as the “dried out world of patriarchy”¹⁶² begins its decline. It is necessary to address the rather difficult languaging of these elements of culture aptly described by Tacey above as ‘patriarchy’ and ‘feminine mystery’. The idea that a patriarchal culture does not contain repressed feminine voices is obviously incorrect. The idea that men don’t contain the repressed feminine is, to my mind, also incorrect. This is not about male versus female but an attempt to restore some balance into a severely unbalanced system.

Performance, Ritual and Altered States

“In the ritual, one has to have participants who are invisible and can actually produce a result that is unexpected. And because we take the risk or the initiative of putting a request to the spirits to intervene in our affairs, their coming turns our activity (ceremony) into a ritual..... The gods themselves will not enact the ritual without us.....So Spirit is our channel through which every gap in life can be filled.”¹⁶³

The above quote of Patrice Malidomas’ addresses an aspect of ritual often forgotten in the rituals of Western Theatre, the invisible presence of the ‘gods’. Invisible presence is not a concept embraced in the west outside the

160 ibid.

161 ibid.

162 ibid.

163 Malidoma:1993:127

established church. For performers to be acknowledging the invisible presence of 'god-like' forces in our theatre, some fairly large areas of actor training and rehearsal need to be addressed. When considering the rituals that might be carried out by actors of our western theatre before a performance, it's not hard to see that there are very few that involve the 'sacred' or 'spiritual'. One might well ask at what point in history was western theatre 'connected' to the force of its essence? Schechner in his book *Between Theatre & Anthropology* talks about the significance of ritual in both rehearsal and preparation.

"Immediately before going on stage, most performers engage in some ritual. The Noh actor contemplates his mask, Jatra performers in Bengal worship the gods of the performance, Stanislavsky advised 30 seconds of silent concentration."¹⁶⁴

Although eastern, western and indigenous performers all engage in some aspect of ritual, it appears the western actor rarely acknowledges the presence of a 'god', or higher self when acting out the ritual. There are many ways to define ritual and one was that of Malidoma in the previous quote. For a broader understanding of ritual in the performative sense a comparison of Richard Schechner's five different viewpoints on ritual stated in his introduction to Victor Turner's book *The Anthropology to Performance* and Victor Turner's definition sheds an interesting light on the subject. Schechner considers ritual to be:

164 Schechner 1989:105

- "1) As part of the evolutionary development of organisms - including, but not limited to, the development of the brain;
- 2) As a structure, something with formal qualities and relationships.
- 3) As a performance process, a dynamic system or action.
- 4) As experience, as what a person individually or as part of a collective feels.
- 5) As a set of operations in human social and religious life."¹⁶⁵

Whereas Turner describes ritual as 'transformative'¹⁶⁶ as "the performance of a complex sequence of symbolic acts."¹⁶⁷ A 'dynamic system' (Schechner) suggests movement that would transform the performer to some degree, however Turner is using 'transformative' to describe a movement that will move the performer to a new status and social position (within the tribe). Turner suggests further that ritual is transformative as it transforms personal and social life crises such as "birth, initiation, marriage, death, into occasions where symbols and values representing the unity and continuity of the total group"¹⁶⁸ are celebrated and reanimated. Meyer Fortes ¹⁶⁹ defined ritual as "a procedure for prehending the occult"¹⁷⁰ and saw ritual as a way of humankind attempting to connect to or 'handle' seemingly unmanageable powers. Both Turner and Fortes seem to support the notion that rituals are involved with forces beyond our knowing and seeing in attempts to come to an understanding of the meaning of the greater events in life, such as, birth and death.

¹⁶⁵ Schechner in Turner 1986:10

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Turner 1986:75

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.157

¹⁶⁹ Fortes was a William Wyse professor of Antropology and Archeology at Cambridge, influenced by Freud and an influence on Turner.

¹⁷⁰ Turner 1986:158

The parallels between performance and sacred rituals are fascinating. Schechner writes at length on this investigation into the sacred and transformative elements of performance.¹⁷¹ Have we lost the 'sacred' in our performance because it's become a 'product'? "When the consumer audience comes in, the 'spiritual powers' depart."¹⁷² Schechner talks about the focus of a sacred performance of the Yaqui Deer Dance¹⁷³ for a very specific audience for which the performance is intrinsically designed and performed. The moment it is taken out of this context and performed for non-Indian people, the 'spiritual powers' are removed. "Understand that the spiritual benefits of the song are withdrawn if the song is commercialised."¹⁷⁴ One might say it is the location, intention, purpose and type of audience that defines the nature of the performance. Many church services could be considered as 'sacred' in the respect of the common aims of audience and performers. The purpose could be to come closer to 'god' and to enter a higher state of self through prayer and singing of religious songs. How is our mainstream theatre removed from these signifiers? One reason our western audience comes to the theatre is to witness a story. One they might know or one they're curious to know. They don't usually know the performers or many others in the audience. There is no particular approach by the performers to the material or any

171 Schechner defines performance as "the whole event, including audience and performers...anyone who is there" (Schechner:1988:??).

172 Schechner 1989:6

173 *ibid.*, p.4-10

particular approach to the playing stage as a sacred space or a site of exchange between the 'gods' and humans. This is one comparison between observed anthropological sites of performance and experienced western performance. Eugenio Barba has developed and founded a school for the study of performance called the School of Theatre Anthropology. Although incorporating the word anthropology, there is little reference to the nature of the more indigenous performances, particularly those of the shaman. Barba describes Theatre Anthropology as:

"the study of the behaviour of the human being when it uses its physical and mental presence in an organised performance situation and according to principles which are different from those used in daily life."¹⁷⁵

Nowhere in this description is a mention of forces at work within and around the performer. It is a very scientific description and serves the purpose of describing a large body of research into performance. Mostly the descriptions of energy within this work revolve around a balance between the two poles of the 'anima' (softness) and 'animus' (vigour)¹⁷⁶ as well as acknowledgement of the way performers of the ancient arts like Noh, Commedia and Balinese Dance describe their use of energy. The dance of the soul is rather overlooked as is the real 'secret art of the performer', the ability to commune with the 'spirits' on behalf of the people and to act as a medium between these 'higher forces' and the audience.

174 ibid., p.5

175 Barba 1995:vii

176 ibid., p.81 These terms are not used in the same way that Jung uses them.

Trance

If there is one field of study that covers the area of trance as a performance element it is anthropology. The state of trance is a fairly key concept with which to view the role of mediating between the peoples and their higher selves or 'gods'. Trance is a fundamental practice of the shaman. In order to journey to the other dimensions of existence a shaman induces an altered state of consciousness in her/himself similar to a state of self-hypnosis. While in this shamanic trance s/he is in complete control; able to take consciousness into non-physical reality where s/he visits the alter-native realms of existence, communicates with and controls spirits, gains information, retrieves souls, and makes subtle changes in reality which may effect the physical world.¹⁷⁷ Joseph Bearwalker Wilson draws parallels between a state of hypnosis and a state of trance.¹⁷⁸ He describes hypnosis as, "a condition or state of selective hypersuggestibility brought about in an individual through the use of certain specific psychological or physical manipulations of the individual."¹⁷⁹ Wilson suggests the a hypnotherapist uses 'selective hypersuggestibility' to help an individual bring about desired changes either within themselves or their lives. Whereas a person practising shamanic techniques uses that state to "fine tune his or her senses in order to see, feel, hear, and smell more vividly while travelling in the other

¹⁷⁷ Taken from edited extracts from a paper written by Joseph Bearwalker Wilson in 1978 describe some theory of the trance state as it applies to shamanism. copyright, 1978, 1995 by Joseph Bearwalker Wilson (bearwalker@aol.com). Reprinted by permission of the author on the web.

¹⁷⁸ Copyright (c) 1978, 1995 Joseph Bearwalker Wilson (Bearwalker@aol.com)

see, feel, hear, and smell more vividly while travelling in the other worlds.”¹⁸⁰ This is what actors engaging in Shamanic Meditational Journeying experience as they enter into the landscape of the play (see Chapter 4).

I Wayan Lendra in his article on “Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels” compares the state of trance to the state of “a powerful actor, whose ‘presence’ deeply affects the spectators.”¹⁸¹ Driving the body past its physical boundaries is a known method of creating altered trance-like states. An actor entering into an altered state does not necessarily connect with a sense or state of ‘god’ or ‘sacred’. The difference between a ‘Sacred Altered Act’ and an ‘altered actor’ is that of connectedness between the actor and her/his higher self or ‘god’. The performance of an altered actor is invariably disabling for the actor and a less connecting experience for the audience as they witness an actor who is unaware of the potential sharing of the journey through the ‘higher self’. Richard Schechner differentiates between “transformation” and “transportation”¹⁸² when dealing with the altered states of the actor. The “transportation performance” is one where the actor moves from the ordinary world to the ‘performative world’ and is transformed in that journey but when the performance is over, the actor returns to the starting place not permanently altered or transformed. Whereas the “transformation performance” actually achieves a

180 ibid.

181 Zarilli:1995:140

transformation in the actor which is relatively permanent.¹⁸³ One example given by Schechner of a transformation performance is an initiation rite which in itself is "the means by which persons achieve their new selves."¹⁸⁴ Similarly, Barba states that "Actors of the classical Asian theatres.....possess a quality of energy which stimulates the spectators' attention....they have a core of energy, an unpremeditated knowing and suggestive irradiation, which captures our senses."¹⁸⁵ I Wayan Lendra writes that in Bali after intense rituals of purification, the performer is finally ready to seek taksu: "the ultimate spiritual power that allows the performer to present his or her art in its truest form."¹⁸⁶ Balinese consider the arts as a "tool for bringing out the expression of the inner spirit, our true nature."¹⁸⁷ Is the "expression of the 'inner spirit' the 'force of its essence?'" Lendra's article highlights the depth of the spiritual rituals of the Balinese performers, citing examples of the cultural beliefs in the presence of other entities or spirits and the responsibility of the artist to become a medium for the audience.¹⁸⁸ In both kinds of performance the actor is altered but we could say that it is the "transformation performance" which is closer to the Sacred Altered Act as opposed to the performance of an altered actor.

182 Schechner 1985:125

183 *ibid.*, p.126

184 *ibid.*, p.127

185 Barba:1995:15

186 Lendra (ed.) Zarilli:1995:142

187 Zarilli:1995:142

188 *ibid.*, p.149

Schechner writing on the effect of Grotowski's training methods on his actors notes that "ex-Grotowskiites have been surprisingly unsuccessful in starting their own theatres or feeding what they've done with Grotowski into their own theatre work."¹⁸⁹ Grotowski was a field researcher of performance rituals, denying the spiritual and religious. "He (Grotowski) intentionally prevented it from knitting in with any social, aesthetic or religious system."¹⁹⁰ Is the denial of the spiritual or 'receptive other' responsible for the final 'separating' and 'stripping down'¹⁹¹ of Grotowski's actors resulting in a 'disabled act' for the actors and audience? The separation of mind and soul is what has occurred in our western theatre. Somehow the rites of the shaman have been lost to us, despite the attempts of Stanislavsky, Chekhov and in a different light, Grotowski. What can we learn from shamanism in the light of a search for a more connecting theatre? As Richard Schechner observes:

"Among primitive peoples the creative condition is identical with trances, dances, ecstasies: in short Shamanism."¹⁹²

Shamanism and Performance

The ability to consciously move beyond the physical body is the particular speciality of the traditional shaman. These journeys of soul may take the shaman into the nether realms, higher levels of existence or to parallel

189 Schechner 1989:106

190 *ibid.*, p.106

191 *ibid.*

physical worlds or other regions of this world. Shamanic Flight is in most instances, an experience not of an inner imaginary landscape, but is reported to be the shamans flight beyond the limitations of the physical body.¹⁹³ It is important to note that shamanism is a method, not a religion. A method which is often associated with the religion known as Animism, but distinct from it...Animism is basically the belief in spirits. Spirits are defined in Shamanism as "those things or beings which are normally not seen by people in ordinary states of consciousness, but are seen by the Shaman in the Shamanic state of consciousness."¹⁹⁴

Shamanism is classified by anthropologists as an archaic magico-religious phenomenon in which the shaman is the great master of ecstasy. Shamanism itself was defined by the late Mircea Eliade as a technique of ecstasy.¹⁹⁵ During the state of ecstasy, often a trance condition, the shaman leaves his/her body and makes contact with the spirit world while retaining consciousness. Ecstasy comes from the Latin root *ex statis*, to stand outside oneself. Interestingly, one of the earliest researchers into aboriginal shamanism was Mary Antoinette Crispine Czaplicka in 1914. Her work on shamanism, mostly in a publication entitled *Aboriginal Siberia*,¹⁹⁶ was used

192 Schechner 1988:41

193 These methods for exploring the inner landscape in a fully conscious way are what informs the Shamanic Meditational Journeying exercise developed over five years by myself and the actors working on each of the three projects of "Hedda Gabler" in 1994, "The Golden Age" in 1996 and "Alabama Rain" in 1999 for actor training use. See Chapter Four of this work for a more detailed description of this exercise.

194 Harner:1980:4-5

195 "A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be Shamanism = technique of ecstasy" (Walsh 1990:10).

196 No details easily found for this other than it exists in the British Library in London.

by Mircea Eliade for his publication *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*.¹⁹⁷ Shamans are mostly healers who are in contact with and work creatively with the supernatural forces which aid them in their work. In all Tungus languages this term (saman/shaman) refers to persons of both sexes who have mastered spirits, who at their will can introduce these spirits into themselves and use their power over the spirits.¹⁹⁸ Shamanism is “a method, a psychic technique”¹⁹⁹ with origins traced back to the Alpine Palaeolithic period, 30,000 to 50,000 years ago. There are many possible interpretations as to what constitutes a shaman. I found the following description by Stevens & Stevens the most accessible for the work I’m engaging in.

“Shamans know about energy and how it works both in the environment and the human body...They know about the spirit body and how to communicate with it.”²⁰⁰

The distinguishing characteristic of shamanism is its focus on an ecstatic trance state in which the soul of the shaman is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky (heavens) or descend into the earth (underworld).²⁰¹ The shaman makes use of spirit helpers, with whom she or he communicates, all the while retaining control over his or her own consciousness (examples of possession occur, but are the exception, rather than the rule). The ability to consciously move beyond the physical body is

197 Eliade. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1964

198 Shirokogoroff was one of the earliest explorers of the Siberian Tungus people (Walsh 1990:9).

199 Lommel:1967:148

200 Stevens & Stevens:1988:11

201 “The Shaman specialises in a trance during which their soul is believed to leave their body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (Walsh 1990:23).

the particular speciality of the traditional shaman. It is this quality of shamanism that could hold a key for the actor, to consciously move beyond the physical. Many religions, new age practices and ancient rituals involve this quality, seeing it as a desirable state where communication between one reality and another imagined or dreamt can take place.

Shamanic Ecstasy and how it compares with other forms of ecstasy

From the Greek *ekstasis*, ecstasy literally means to be placed outside, or to be placed. This is a state of exaltation in which a person stands outside of or transcends his or herself. Ecstasy may range from the seizure of the body by a spirit or the seizure of a person by the divine, from magical transformation or flight of consciousness to psychiatric remedies of distress.

Three types of Ecstasy are specified by J.B. Wilson²⁰² on the subject:

A. Shamanic Ecstasy.

Shamanic ecstasy is provoked by the ascension of the soul of the shaman into the heavens or its descent into the underworld. These states of ecstatic exaltation are usually achieved after great and strenuous training and initiation, often under distressing circumstances. The resulting contact by the shaman with the higher or lower regions and their inhabitants, and also with nature spirits, enables her or him to accomplish such tasks as: accompanying the soul of a deceased into its proper place in the next world;

202 1978, 1995 Joseph B. Wilson. Joseph Bearwalker Wilson (Bearwalker@aol.com)

affect the well-being of the sick; and, to convey the story of their inner travels, upon their return, to the mundane awareness.

B. Prophetic Ecstasy.

The utterances of the shaman are in contrast with those of prophetic and mystical ecstasy. The prophet literally speaks for God, while the mystic reports an overwhelming divine presence.

C. Mystical Ecstasy.

In mysticism, the direct knowledge or experience of the divine ultimate reality, is perceptible in two ways, emotional and intuitive. While these three varieties of ecstatic experience are useful for the purposes of analysis and discussion, it is not unusual for more than one form of ecstasy to be present in an individual's experience.

However, it can be argued that, generally speaking, there are three perceptive levels of ecstasy.

A. Physiological perception, in which the mind becomes absorbed in and focused on a dominant idea, the attention is withdrawn and the nervous system itself is in part cut off from physical sensory input. The body exhibits reflex inertia, involuntary nervous responses, frenzy.

B. Emotional perception of ecstasy refers to overwhelming feelings of awe, anxiety, joy, sadness, fear, astonishment, passion, etc.

C. Intuitive perception communicates a direct experience and understanding of the transpersonal experience of expanded states of awareness or consciousness.

While the physiological response is always present, the emotional response may or may not be significant when intuition is the principal means of ecstatic perception. Some have argued that beyond the intuitive state there is a fourth condition in which the holistic perception exceeds mental and emotional limitations and understanding.

The ecstatic experience of the shaman goes beyond a feeling or perception of the sacred, the demonic or of natural spirits. It involves the shaman directly and actively in transcendent realities or lower realms of being. These experiences may occur in either the dream state, the awakened state, or both. Dreams, and in particular, lucid dreams, often play a significant role in the life of a shaman or shamanic candidate.

More specifically, a society may be said to be 'Post-Shamanic' when at least six of the following eight conditions have been met:

1. Shamanic ecstasy is still present, but light trance techniques are also used to access the Otherworld.
2. Agriculture and some forms of manufacturing/crafts have replaced hunting and gathering as the primary basis for the economic life of the community.
3. The society has developed a highly stratified social structure and very specialised occupations.
4. Religion and spiritual methodology has become more fully developed and can no longer be properly referred to as "archaic". This is

especially important for rituals, ceremonies and ecstatic techniques which had traditionally been the domain of the shamans.

5. Mystical ecstasy and intuitive visions have become at least as important esoteric experiences and doctrines as shamanic ecstasy, ascension and descent in the religious and spiritual life of the community.
6. The shaman is no longer the primary escort for the souls of the dead into their place in the next world (psychopomp). This role generally either passes onto the priestcraft or clergy to perform through ritual, is an object of individual or group prayer, or is believed to be done by gods of guardian spirits, angels or demons.
7. A professional clergy is present which regulates the religious life of the community.
8. Other forms of healing, divining and counselling are present and have replaced shamans as the primary source of such services.

Trance States

Dr. Jeanne Achterberg, noted author and educator ²⁰³ states in her article entitled *The Shaman: Master healer in the Imaginary Realm*:

²⁰³

Co-author with Frank Lawlis of Bridges of the BodyMind. Author of Imagery and Healing and Woman As Healer. Co-author of Rituals of Healing: Using Imagery for Health and Wellness. Faculty Member, Saybrook Institute, San Francisco. Director of research for the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, Saybrook Institute, San Francisco.

"The shaman is plugging into a data bank that can" be known in the normal, waking state of consciousness."²⁰⁴

Achterberg also writes that:

"Medical historian, Gordon Risse (1972) claims that in the state of consciousness used in shamanism, mental resources are employed which modern persons either no longer have access to or are not interested in using."²⁰⁵

In order to journey to the other dimensions of existence a shaman induces an altered state of consciousness in himself similar to a state of self-hypnosis. While in this shamanic trance s/he is in complete control; able to take her consciousness and subtle bodies into non-physical reality where s/he visits the heavens and hells of existence, communicates with and controls spirits, gains information, retrieves souls, and makes subtle changes in reality which may affect the physical world. ²⁰⁶

A classical and fairly accurate descriptive definition of hypnosis is "a condition or state of selective hypersuggestibility brought about in an individual through the use of certain specific psychological or physical manipulations of the individual."²⁰⁷ The key words here are "selective hypersuggestibility". A hypnotherapist uses that selective hypersuggestibility in order to help bring about desired changes in an individual. On the other hand a person practising shamanic techniques uses that state in order to fine

204 Jeanne Achterberg. Ch. 6 in "Shamanism" compiled by Shirley Nicholson. 1990:108

205 Jeanne Achterberg. Ch. 6 in "Shamanism" compiled by Shirley Nicholson. 1990:108

206 *ibid.*

207 *ibid.*

tune her senses in order to see, feel, hear, and smell more vividly while travelling in the other worlds.

Achterberg suggests that the ability to attain and control a trance is the result of cumulative conditioning and mental training. That you train your mind to respond in accordance with your will in order to produce the ability to develop a deep trance. This is done by daily practice. It may take some time and effort to establish that ability, but once you have it you will be able to maintain it by practising only once or twice per week. If you stop practising entirely your ability will gradually lessen.

When you go into any trance you gradually progress from ordinary consciousness into deeper levels. It's convenient to have a means of measuring the depth of your trance, so the paragraphs that follow outline some of the symptoms found at various depths. Achterberg has divided the depths of trance into four major sections, and, using terms borrowed from the hypnotic sciences, called them the Hypnodial, Light, Medium, and Deep trance states.

In the Hypnodial Trance you progress from ordinary consciousness through the following steps:

1. feeling physically relaxed;
2. drowsy;
3. your mind becomes relaxed and you may feel apathetic or indifferent;
4. your arms and legs start to feel heavy;

5. you may have a tendency to stare blankly; and
6. have a disinclination to move your limbs.

As you border this and the Light Trance, breathing becomes slower and deeper, and your pulse rate slows.

In the Light Trance you progress to a reluctance to move, speak, think or act. You may experience some involuntary twitching of your mouth or jaw, and sometimes of the eyes. You will feel a heaviness throughout your entire body and a partial feeling of detachment. You may also experience visual illusions. As you border this and the Medium Trance you recognise that you are in a trance, but may find that feeling hard to describe.

In the Medium Trance you definitely recognise that you are in a trance and may experience partial amnesia unless you consciously choose not to. By giving yourself the proper suggestions you can make any part of your body insensitive to pain, and can experience the illusions of touching, tasting, and smelling. You will be more sensitive to variations in atmospheric pressure and temperature changes. As you border this and the Deep Trance you may experience complete catalepsy of your limbs or body. In other words, if your limbs or body positions are changed you will leave them in the new position until they are changed again.

In the Deep Trance you can have the ability to open your eyes without affecting the trance. You will also have the ability to control such body functions as heartbeat, blood pressure, digestion, and body temperature. You

can make your body and limbs completely rigid. You will be able to recall lost memories and experience age regression. Here you can vividly experience the sensation of lightness, floating, or flying. You can also experience both positive and negative visual and auditory hallucinations both while in the trance, and, if given the proper suggestions, after awakening from the trance-state. (A positive hallucination is when you are told that you see something that is not there, and you see it. A negative hallucination is when you are told that you do not see something that is there, and you do not.) In this state you can also stimulate dreams and visions, both during the trance-state and (upon proper suggestion) later in your natural sleep.

Each depth of trance has valuable uses. For example, in the Light and Medium Trances you can learn to begin practical shamanic journeying so that you can see, hear, touch and smell experiences in the worlds which border ours. In those trance states these journeys will feel similar to a fantasy or a daydream and you may wonder if it is real, or just your imagination. As you train yourself to deepen the trance the journeys become more vivid, until, in the Deep Trance, they look and feel as though they are taking place in physical reality.

The above information derived from Jeanne Achterberg's work and was useful to me in the exercise of channelling with the actors. In order to achieve the state most conducive to channelling, the actor entered into a

state of trance. This was to allow the character to take over the body of the actor. Often the actor did not remember what happened or what the character said.

One interesting example of accessing shamanic journey states is a series of experiments conducted by Felicitas Goodman in 1977 with graduate students from Ohio State University.²⁰⁸ Goodman was investigating the relationship between controlled posture and trance experiences. The exercise involved asking the students to adopt the positions of “selected body postures where the religious context seemed self evident.”²⁰⁹ Each posture was drawn from different meditative disciplines including shamanic and aboriginal art.²¹⁰ Apart from the discovery by Goodman and the students that many of the postures released specific energies within the body, they also found that most of the postures were conducive to shamanic journeys where other realities were consciously entered and experienced. The reports of these journeys are very similar to the journeys experienced by the student and professional actors using the Shamanic Meditational Journeying exercise to find their character. For example, the following accounts are from three completely different people in very different situations and countries who experienced forms of shamanic trance and journeying.

208 Dr Felicitas Goodman is a psychological anthropologist. Until her retirement (1979) she taught at Denison University. She is the author of several books, the most recent being *How about Demons: Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World* (USA1988) p54

209 Goodman:1988:54

1. "I felt that I was rising up right away and saw some spirits dancing. I saw a river flowing downward toward a mountain, so I entered it, became a fish and followed its flow. I arrived in a misty forest, I left the river and started walking among the trees. Suddenly I saw a black wolf. It had a white spot. I merged with the wolf and then became part of the mist."²¹¹

2. "I looked around and saw a monkey who stared at me then pointed at a snake who was just about to strike. It bit me and as the poison went into my system I felt immense heat. It passed through me and I was myself again. Next to me swam a fish that showed me its family and invited me to join them. I felt that the fish was telling me 'all is one, I am the same as you'."²¹²

3. "I am entering a wet, muddy land, it is a faraway place. I have never been here before. I am becoming the earth, it swallows me, in a huge sucking action, I am gone, underneath the soil - then I am spat out. Now I see my character, in the distance, she dances, she is covered in mud. All that is clearly visible is her vibrant orange hair. Her movement is wild and frenetic one minute and then soft and controlled the next. A deer nudges me and tells me it is time to leave now...."²¹³

Actors using the Shamanic Journey technique (see Chapter Four) to journey to the world of the play experienced the landscape clearly and often had powerful 'experiences' with their characters. Steve Mizrach writes in his article 'Ayahuasca, Shamanism, and Curanderismo in the Andes':

"Many claim their 'soul flight' takes them to familiar locations which are close-by, and that they

210 ibid.

211 From an account by a student working with Shamanic Trance Postures with Felicitas Goodman in 1997 (Goodman:1988:54).

212 An account by a student working with Shamanic Journeying with myself on the production of *Hedda Gabler* in 1994.

213 Claude Widtmann (Besheb) in *Hedda Gabler*.

navigate among landscapes using recognisable landmarks."²¹⁴

Mizrach discusses at length the use of Yage (also known as 'the visionary vine') by Andean shaman. Mizrach identifies the affects of Yage as:

"The experience that the Yage plant confers on Western users is so similar to accounts of the Near-Death Experience (NDE) (as noted by would-be shamans such as Alberto Villoldo, Michael Harner, and Terrence McKenna) that some are sure it's practically a gateway to the spirit world."²¹⁵

He goes on to say that many Andean shamans using Yage, experience the following:

- "1) the feeling of separation of the soul from the body, and taking flight.
- 2) visions of jaguars (interpreted as positive), and snakes and other predatory animals (usually thought to be negative).
- 3) a sense of contact with supernatural agencies (Andean demons and divinities).
- 4) visions of distant cities and landscapes (thought to be clairvoyance).
- 5) detailed reenactments of previous events (thought to be retrocognition.)"²¹⁶

Although this altered state of consciousness is accessed or catalysed by the use of a powerful hallucinogen, it seems that the journeys of the Andean shamans and the students not using drugs have several aspects in common.

They are:

214 Article titled "Ayahuasca, Shamanism, and Curanderismo in the Andes" by Steve Mizrach.

215 *ibid.*

216 Villoldo:1990

Common Elements of Shamanic Journeying

1. The notion of a journey from one reality to another which appears as real as the one left.
2. Visions of and encounters with animal entities that either assist or challenge the traveller sometimes resulting in a 'shamanic death' where the traveller is reborn by being killed by the animal.
3. Sensations of flight. Sometimes as a bird, disembodied or in their own body.
4. All five senses are active in the 'imagined landscape'.
5. Retaining of the 'conscious state' throughout the journey.

Shamanism has many different meanings in different cultures with no final authority on its interpretation because of its oral traditions, age and cultural spread.

Culture and Appropriation

The 'cultural borrowings' inherent in this actor training approach must be recognised as possible appropriations and considered accordingly. The difficulty in quoting accurately from the cultural sources as Patrice Pavis suggests in his book, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* is that the cultural sources are widespread, thousands of years old, often passed on by word of mouth and then recorded by many different voices in different cultures. Diana Taylor argues that culture can also be a "face of conscious

politicization".²¹⁷ Cultural symbols can be manipulated, actively producing culture. Theatre has certainly had a history of affecting change, challenging norms and prompting questions about our lives and culture. Shaping the way we think, stories are powerful tools and so, it follows, theatre must be. Admittedly, this influence appears to be largely through the content rather than the form, the rehearsal process or the actor training, that is, the story is what carries the greatest influence on our thinking. So far.

The work of many new theatre makers as well as that of the established 'alternative' and 'avant garde' has contributed an exploration of form which is developing its own niche. Companies such as *Legs on the Wall*, *The Sydney Front* (now disbanded), *Zen Zen Zo* and many others have established a more physical style of story telling to great success. The influences for these 'new' forms and styles have come from different cultures and the different theatre training of those cultures, such as Suzuki, Kabuki, No and the Circus of China and Russia. When the Chinese Circus trained the Fruit Flies in Albury²¹⁸ in the early 80's, they not only passed on physical skills but the intense focus and discipline of their culture that came with it. A style of training was taught, an approach to training that made the work more 'sacred' and valued. This approach showed through in the performances, as did the influences from another culture. In other words, the energy, style and approach of the rehearsal or training is evident in the

217 Taylor 1991:91

218 I was present for several of these workshops and observed the training methods.

performance. The difficult aspect here is identifying in language available, the aesthetic nature of this quality. If a theatre work is 'special' or 'different' or has 'that extra something', we all know it was good, we were reached, involved or touched but we have no other words to identify the nature of the difference with. This is very much the case with 'shamanic' and 'spiritual' approaches to actor training and rehearsal.

Does making the rehearsal space a 'sacred' place where journeys into whole landscapes of imagination, dialogues with inner voices, a place where the actors explore the energy within, between themselves and others as well as their 'higher self' translate to these qualities being present in performance on the stage? How to define this result of working in another way that has been inspired by other cultures is still a challenge.

The question of culture and its inter-relationship with theatre is a large one and not the prime focus of this paper. However, it is impossible to look at such influences as shamanism without addressing the appropriation of another culture's rituals into our own. Is this a manipulation or a growth? When considering whether it is the role of theatre to shape and influence the culture of a society as well as to reflect the culture, I am taking the approach that it is vital for theatre to embrace the shaping and influencing of culture, not just the reflecting of it. Meaning systems consist of negotiated agreements -- members of a human society must agree to relationships between a word, behaviour, or other symbol and its

corresponding significance or meaning.²¹⁹ To the extent that culture consists of systems of meaning, it also consists of negotiated agreements and processes of negotiation. The theatre surely has a role here in the offering up of new meanings and interpretations in order for growth of culture to occur.

Finding a Voice For the Inarticulate Soul

As we become a global economy with vastly improved systems of communication and travel, the melding of cultural aspects is inevitable. As a 'white' Australian I have relatively little knowledge of the indigenous culture of my own country yet have felt a need to access the 'spiritual' life of this land and the forces within and around it. Much has been published and shared on the American Native Indians, their cultures and their approaches to life. As has an enormous amount of literature on anthropological studies of shamanism throughout the world. This information on other cultures has given a voice to a previously inarticulate spirituality within myself. Quite a few of the actors who worked with elements and ideas from shamanism responded in similar ways which suggests that although not born of our culture, there are aspects of shamanism that we feel 'at home' or at one with, spiritually.

²¹⁹ Raymond Williams, from an excerpt entitled "Culture is Ordinary" in *Moving from High Culture to Ordinary Culture* (McKenzie:1958).

Theatre reflects our culture and in doing so, reflects the people in that culture. The actor is not only our representative but also our mirror. Training our actors with a sense of 'spiritual realism' in mind not only incorporates a necessary part of our culture but also an entire aspect of the self left out by the training systems of the past sixty or so years. Actors have always sensed energy, from the audience, from each other and within themselves. One of the struggles of the spiritual approach to acting in the western world is the establishment of the spiritual nature outside the regimes of the church. The assistant director of *The Golden Age*²²⁰ recorded the following comments from cast members:

1. "In some ways I felt like she (McCutcheon) was trying to give us a new religion....Because I've had a Christian background I thought it was going to be really confronting and I wouldn't agree with a lot of it."²²¹
2. "One cast member whom I interviewed was initially a little confronted by McCutcheon's methodology."²²²
3. "Other cast members took to shamanism quite quickly....(they) were inspired by what they were learning and went on to delve deeper into shamanism."²²³

Language is an important factor, whatever area we're trying to communicate with others in. It's particularly important when attempting to establish new or alternative ways of exploring the inner worlds of self.

220 "The Golden Age" by Louis Nowra was the second production to use rehearsal exercises that incorporated chakra work, channelling and shamanic journeying (these exercises are explained in detail in chapter four of this work).

221 Student actor, *The Golden Age* 1996

222 Jacqueline Cummins, Assistant Director, *The Golden Age* 1996.

223 *ibid.*

Re-assessing the 'sacred' is another way to assist the actor in their search and inner journey. Finding a language that is accessible to actors and directors with different spiritual or religious beliefs is definitely one of the challenges in this work and can only come about with further exploration and experimentation. As previously stated, the way we train actors affects their ability to reflect the many dimensions of our humanity and our potential back to us. The state of the actor reflects the state of the tribe. One would assume this would naturally include the inner state as well as the outer. The silent partner of the actor is spirit. How do we language this place of spirit today?

The radical feminist voice has perhaps begun this journey, questioning and deconstructing thousands of years of a language that as effectively 'possessed' the concept of spirit as one belonging solely to the church. The 'receptive other', the female, the feminine, the indigenous, the pagan, all have been omitted from the dominant discourse. As Helene Cixous observes:

"Night to his day-that has forever been the fantasy.
Black to his white. Shut out of his system's space,
she is the repressed that ensures the system's
functioning."²²⁴

224 Cixous:1993:67

Chapter Three

THE RECEPTIVE OTHER

Re-Languaging the Inner via the Feminine Voice

As stated in the introduction, the majority of actor training techniques used in today's western actor training institutions have been constructed by men during the last one hundred years and are still used as the key actor training systems by actor training institutions of the western world.²²⁵ What these practitioners created and left as legacies to theatre are wonderful techniques to be built on, re-interpreted and added to with the knowledge, language and consciousness we have accessed since their times. One outstanding addition and influence to our language and consciousness today is that of the radical feminist voice.²²⁶

"Radical means 'pertaining to the root'; Radical Feminism looks at the roots of women's oppression."²²⁷

Through the writings of women including, but not limited to, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Simone De Beauvoir, the 'other' has been identified, explored and made explicit.

The term 'receptive other' has been created in an attempt to escape the boundaries of gender. It is part of an attempt to re-language the inner energy

225 Including, N.I.D.A., W.A.A.P.A., V.C.A., Tisch School of the Arts, The Actors Studio, New York.

226 "Feminism began to be perceived (*in the 1970's*) as a specific political practice and analysis, committed to radical change and direct political action" (Case:1988:63).

227 Rowland and Klein from *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* edited by Sneja

sites of the actor with the idea of 'to be possessed' strongly in mind. The term 'receptive' suggests a more passive and female quality which I believe is necessary for the actor if they are 'to be possessed' by the character. This term encourages and allows the actor to embrace their own 'god' within and to explore depths of the self as a pioneer experiences a journey through previously unknown, although sometimes familiar, terrain. Language is an important part of this journey to the inner self for an actor. It establishes boundaries and permissions, walking tracks and markers that enable the actor to recognise and remember the journey, bringing back with her new and rich information about the character or herself:

"Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today."²²⁸

The 'imaginary zone' Cixous refers to is also one of the necessary keys to an actor's ability with which to access their creative energies. The language used to enable the actor to access the imagination has historically been patriarchal. The realm or 'zone' of the imagination is vast and difficult in any discipline to define as it is dependent on the culture and language of the describer. Feminism has questioned all patriarchal values, laws and religions in such a way that these constructs must not only be reconsidered but irrevocably altered. Mary Daly writes that the women's movement:

"can become the greatest single challenge to the major religions of the world, Western and Eastern.

228 Gunew 1990:271
Cixous:1993:ix

Beliefs and values that have held sway for thousands of years will be questioned as never before. This revolution may well be also the greatest single hope for survival of spiritual consciousness on this planet.”²²⁹

Marie Tulip comments:

“What Daly is attacking is not only the fact that the whole system of theology and ethics was developed by men, but also that it was developed to serve the interests of men. It is based on a system of sexual hierarchy to which patriarchal religion gives its blessing.”²³⁰

In terms of actor training, the language of feminist writers accesses us to a larger potential of the imaginary zone of the actor. By re-languaging this inner space via the feminist voice the space for the ‘receptive other’, the feminine that has been repressed in all of us is opened away from patriarchal imagery of the past into a deeper, more complex and accessible place of imagination. There are several voices, however, that offer a suggestion of the contents and meanings of the realm of imagination. One is Jean Houston who writes:

“Within each of us is this curled up, hyperspatial, hypertemporal reality of forms, patterns, evolutionary cadences, codings, persona of high qualities that we call gods - all these co-existent with us.”²³¹

Whatever we might call this place of imagination, it is time to create inroads to this space using contemporary language along with that of the past. The actor, along with her culture needs to know this is not a fearful

229 Daly:1973:13,14

230 Tulip (ed.) Gunew: 1990:232

place full of demons, madness and taboos. These methods explored in this project are aimed to access the inner spaces and develop a sense of the 'receptive other' in a way that empowers, excites and constructively aids the actor in her creation of character and quality of acting. This, of course is not a new idea. Michael Chekhov in his address to the Drama Society of Hollywood in 1955 stated:

"Deep within ourselves are buried tremendous creative powers and abilities. But they remain unused so long as we deny them. They lie dormant because we do not open the doors to our hidden vaults and fearlessly bring them to the surface."²³²

The language, 'hidden vaults' does not easily open these spaces to us. At the time of Chekhov's writing, Freud and Jung were the key language of these inner, 'hidden vaults'. Grotowski writes:

"the actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals themselves..... must be able to express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality."²³³

Michael Chekhov's improvisations advanced the notion that:

"scenic space could have a special, almost bewitching, aura filled with intoxicating atmospheres."²³⁴

Stanislavsky voices a predicament for him when he stated:

"We are supposed to create under inspiration; only our subconscious gives us inspiration; yet we

231 Houston:1990:63
232 Chekhov:1953:19
233 Schechner:1968:29,35,8
234 Chekhov:1991:18

apparently can only use this subconsciousness
through our consciousness, which kills it.”²³⁵

It’s clear that these inner spaces of self are difficult to articulate. Each practitioner quoted is searching for a way in, to access the ‘hidden vaults’. They all knew that the depths of creativity lay within these difficult to describe places past consciousness so eloquently explained by Helene Cixous:

“It is deep in my body, further down, behind thought. Thought comes in front of it and it closes like a door. This does not mean that it does not think, but it thinks differently from our thinking and speech.....”²³⁶

This language is not trapped in psychology or religion yet attempts to speak of the hidden depths without labelling or owning them in a dominant sense. This is a voice of the ‘receptive other’, accessing us to these spaces with permission to experience them outside dominant discourses. It is the second half of Cixous’ quote which takes us more into the politics behind the poetics:

“....I know besides that what also prevents us in our society from going there, is not our inability - but our cowardice, our fear. Our fear, since all of us know perfectly well that we will reach that dangerous point where those who are excluded live.”²³⁷

The language of Helene Cixous walks us through the dark towards ourselves, beyond the external constructions of reality, past the doors of the ‘hidden vaults’ and into the inner worlds of self. As established in Chapter

235 Stanislavsky:1980:13

236 Cixous:1994:204

237 *ibid*

One, historical traditions of actor training have excluded the 'feminine' whilst at the same time searching for a way into those excluded spaces. As a result the actor has not been encouraged to enter into the inner realms beyond those of the body, the emotions and the mind.

The 'she' in the above quote is the feminine, the 'receptive other' within both genders. My argument is not with men colonising women's space but with the denial of the feminine beyond the concept of gender. This is an essential difference that must be noted. The use of feminist writings, theories and methodologies in this work is to assist in the identification and realised denial of the female and the feminine within the patriarchal construct of western society. Reading statements such as De Beauvoir's that "Woman thus seems to be the inessential who never goes back to being the essential, to be the absolute Other without reciprocity",²³⁸ the gender of woman is what is seen to be at risk within patriarchy. The writing of this thesis however, views 'woman' as the denied, repressed, oppressed and marginalised aspect of *self within the whole* being which is both male and female, woman and man, feminine and masculine. It is not in the interest of theatre to continue the separation of the genders but to identify the repressed female within the imagination of the actor, the writer, the director and therefore the audience.

If, as Philip Auslander writes, "Theorists as diverse as Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski all implicitly designate the actor's self as the *logos* of performance; all assume that the actor's self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that

238 De Beauvoir:1997:173

provides the audience with access to human truths",²³⁹ then the concept of 'self' for the actor on behalf of the audience must be interrogated. The actor draws upon the self in the creation of character and often in the creation of text. If, within this 'self' the female/feminine/other is seen as lesser, without power, often beyond language as Cixous suggests, then the outcome of the actor's creative search for self will always reproduce the dominant idea of male/masculine as the more powerful choice. If, as Cixous suggests, "Being possessed is not desirable for a masculine imaginary",²⁴⁰ then the actor is faced with the dilemma of choosing representation of a character whose traits are "institutionalised through patriarchal culture"²⁴¹ over being 'possessed' by the character. Traditionally, to surrender is considered female, to possess male. How do actors connect with the 'higher realms' of self or the 'gods' on behalf of the audience if their training has consistently denied the nurturing of their ability to surrender?! Sue-Ellen Case in *Feminism and Theatre* shows clearly the history of theatre as a patriarchal construct. She writes: "Theatre must be gender - specific to the male and enact the suppression of real women"²⁴² referring to the fact that traditionally women in theatre have had to establish themselves within the boundaries of "male-originated signs":²⁴³

"As a result of the suppression of real women, the culture invented its own representation of the gender, and it was this fictional 'Woman' who appeared on the stage, in the myths and in the plastic arts, representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the

239 Auslander:1995:60

240 Cixous:1993:86

241 Case:1988:11

242 *ibid.*, p.10

243 *ibid.*

experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women."²⁴⁴

It seems fifty percent of the population have been historically denied the right to establish what 'real women' are in our culture, theatre, literature and education. As women re-establish their truths beyond the dominant discourse another aspect of 'self' is opened up. Much of this 'self' is connected with the inner life, the receptacle of all that could not be acted or spoken. Surrendering to inner truths beyond the dominant construct of language is one way of accessing the previously repressed feminine and receptive other. Exercises that bypass the conditioning of the mind and invite the actor to explore those parts of self denied by history opens up a whole new-world while at the same time accessing universal, or as Jung would say 'collective unconscious'. Both male and female actors need to re-develop this part of themselves on behalf of the audience; the ability to be possessed without fear, to be this receptive other.

Peggy Phelan in *Mourning Sex* suggests yet another interpretation of this all encompassing word 'other': "Western theatre is itself predicated on the belief that there is an audience, an other willing to be cast in the role of auditor."²⁴⁵ She goes on to suggest that 'God' might be the ideal spectator, who never turns up for the performance, making theatre a perpetual rehearsal. This dilemma of the absent 'God' connects back to the earlier discussion in chapter two regarding the loss of the sacred and spiritual in our western theatre. Feminist writings have also assisted in the de-

²⁴⁴ ibid., p.7

²⁴⁵ Phelan:1997:31

construction and re-languaging of the traditional, patriarchal construct of 'God'. Cixous writes:

"To look straight at the face of God, which is none other than my own face, but seen naked, the face of my soul. The face of "God" is the unveiling, the staggering vision of the construction we are."²⁴⁶

In some segments of our culture this writing could be seen as heresy and Cixous would certainly have been burnt at the stake in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The power of the patriarchal Christian construct of 'God' has been overwhelming and very responsible for the removal of so many primitive 'gods' and cultures. Religion is far too big a topic for this thesis, however it is of concern where the concepts of 'god', 'soul' and 'higher self' are used in this actor training technique. Both Stanislavsky and Chekhov referred to 'higher self', 'soul' and 'spirit'. Schechner, Turner and Barba have all referred to the place of 'god' within the performances of Asian and indigenous cultures but rarely their own. Somewhere our sense of self, 'god' and 'soul' have become confused. For Cixous to be suggesting the face of 'god' lies within her own face is certainly unacceptable to many western religions, however it is well understood by many indigenous cultures where the shaman is in constant contact with the 'gods' or the performers 'channel'²⁴⁷ the 'gods' in a trance state. The 'state' that performers tap into is elusive in terms of definition. Carl Jung's notion of the 'collective unconscious' certainly covers a large potential layer of this

²⁴⁶ Cixous:1994:201

²⁴⁷ "In the past the words 'medium' or 'psychic' were used when speaking of contacting guides. This is being replaced by the word 'channel'" (Roman & Packer:1987:1). More on channelling in Chapter Four.

state. It is certainly a state that offers parallel dimensions of amazing similarities to those who tap into it on a shamanic level. As Jung states:

“Social, political, and religious conditions affect the collective unconscious in the sense that all those factors which are suppressed by the prevailing views or attitudes in the life of a society gradually accumulate in the collective unconscious and activate its contents. The new ideas spread rapidly because parallel changes have been taking place in the unconscious of other people.”²⁴⁸

It is here, within this site of feminist writing and politics that the writings of patriarchal psychologists such as Jung interweave a sensibility of compatible language in the search for a way of re-languaging our inner. The ideas of ‘collective’ and ‘universal’ are not exclusive or possessive and appear to belong with the ideas suggested by writers such as Cixous in the writing of the inner spaces. Perhaps Jill Dolan’s statement in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* provides some insight as to why the feminist voice can aid the languaging of spirit:

“Women are spiritual; men have lost touch with their spirit in their all-encompassing drive to conquer and claim. These equations might seem simplistic...but this formulation of sexual difference is the bedrock of cultural feminist thought.”²⁴⁹

Within this statement, and the writing of Helen Cixous, are contained notions of the shadow side of humanity, the ‘dark’ place, the asylum or energy of the inner spirit beyond the reaches of the established religions. ‘She’ from the perspective of challenging the present masculine actor training techniques, is the feminine, spiritual, sacred, hidden depths which the masculine construct has feared, tortured, denied and desired for

248 Jung:1920:594

249 Dolan:2000:7

millennia. To journey through the dark towards the self is the hero's journey for the actor on behalf of the actors' tribe: the audience.

Chapter Four

Theory into Practice

The Project

Alabama Rain is the practicum of this thesis and consisted of a four week rehearsal period which attempted to explore the possibilities of developing an actors ability to enter into and share the altered space through the development of actor training exercises and rituals which draw on the influences of shamanism, theosophy and meditational journeying. Resulting in a two week performance period at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney in January 1999.

The aims of this methodology or approach are not unlike those of Stanislavsky, Chekhov or Grotowski. Certain exercises were developed and used, engaging in ideas like the 'higher self', 'channelling', the use of imagination, the concept of 'chakras' and aiming towards developing the sharing of the 'sacred' space between the actor and the audience. The amount of literature available on this subject is limited. Jerzy Grotowski and others such as Schechner played with the placement of the audience and the effect it has on the audience-actor dynamic while practitioners like Boal and Barba explored the connection in more political and sociological ways. Very little of the literature explores the energy transactions and the 'connectedness' of this relationship existing between audience members and performers. Eugenio Barba addresses aspects of this 'metaphysical' presence

in theatre when he writes:

“There is a part of us which lives in exile, which we or others (the others in us) do not find acceptable or sufficiently important. Certain performances burgeon in this rationally, morally or emotionally exiled region. The spectator does not consume these performances. Often s/he does not understand them or does not know how to evaluate them. But s/he continues to have a dialogue with the memories which these performances have sown deep in her/his spirit.”²⁵⁰

The exercises developed for this project and contained in this chapter are attempts to address the exiled regions in more articulate ways and to acknowledge that actors and performers can be trained to access these parts on behalf of the audience. The hopeful outcome is that audience members will feel touched and reached. If the audience member feels a part of them awakened as well then the training is successful.

Background

The production of *Alabama Rain* by Heather McCutchen (no relation) is the practical component of this doctorate. There is a 57 minute documentary of the rehearsal process accompanying this chapter. The production ran for two weeks downstairs at Belvoir Street as part of the Sydney Fringe Festival in January 1999. The script was chosen for its unique languaging of the esoteric as well as for its humour and story. I watched a moved reading of *Alabama Rain* directed by Rodney Fisher at the National Playwrights Conference in Canberra in 1994. The writer, Heather McCutchen had been brought out by the New York dramatists to develop

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E Barba “Four Spectators’ in *The Drama Review*, 1997

the play with Australian actors. I then obtained a copy of the script (which is still unpublished) in New York in 1996. I secured the rights in 1998.²⁵¹

Script Synopsis

The story revolves around five sisters existing on a dry, barren property in Alabama, USA, where it hasn't rained for forty years. In the first five minutes the eldest, PHEENIE, leaves on a quest for water and LAURIE LAURIE dies in the first scene as a result of her sister's departure. The three remaining sisters, MONTY LOU (who has been pregnant for 19 years), RACHEL and DALLAS (the youngest) struggle with their fears and the ghost of LAURIE LAURIE who refuses to leave them in peace. Water and time are dominant metaphors throughout the play. The lack of water represents the exiled feelings of the sisters and time is on an existential circuit taking us back to the beginning once again. The Well in the story is feared by all five sisters as an entity that "will take things from you and you'll never be the same again."²⁵² The turning point comes as DALLAS finally confronts this fear on behalf of all of them, (and the audience), and buries LAURIE LAURIE's body at the bottom of the Well releasing the rain and torrents of water onto the land.

The play deals with life after death, rebirth and change, all areas which have a relationship with many aspects of the methodology.

²⁵¹ In retrospect I acknowledge there were problems with the script structure and poetics. The script could have benefited from some editing.

²⁵² 'Rachel' from the text of *Alabama Rain* written by Heather McCutchen

The Selection of Actors

Audition notices were posted at the Actors Centre in Surry Hills, Sydney during November 1998 only.²⁵³ Twenty-two actors replied and fifteen auditioned. The actors were told of the experimental nature of the work during audition. Auditions were held at the Actors Centre in Surry Hills, Sydney during November 1998. All actors selected were committed to the research and were looking for another approach as a development of their own training/skills.

One actor had trained at the Stella Adler Studio in L.A., one at Lee Strasberg's Studio in New York. The other three actors had come through Australian University Theatre courses. Two of these actors had experienced this approach as Theatre Media students at Charles Sturt University, working as a set designer for Hedda Gabler and playing the part of 'Hedda' in *Hedda Gabler* (1994) (although they were not chosen for this reason). The audition process involved two learnt pieces, an improvisation and an interview concerning the actor's experience of and relationship to spiritual aspects of their work and life. The points of consideration in selecting the actors were:

- * Openness to new ideas.
- * Ability to understand and accept the experimental nature of the rehearsal process.
- * Previous experience of alternative approaches to actor training.
- * Allowing their image to be used in the documentary.
- * Previous professional experience as an actor.

²⁵³ I knew of the spiritual approach some of the classes there had and hoped for like-minded actors to work with.

* An attitude of exploration and adventure.

The Rehearsal

The rehearsal period had to fulfil several objectives:

1. The actors had to be taught the experimental exercises and enter into the development of them.
2. The text had to be investigated, learnt and blocked.
3. A documentary of the rehearsal process involving actor and audience interviews had to be made.

The rehearsal was structured in such a way that after the preliminary reading of the text, most mornings were focused on the training and the afternoons on development of character using text (one day was spent with voice coach George Leppard on accents and use of the voice.) Traditional approaches such as unit breakdown, text analysis, identifying of themes etc. still existed within the rehearsal structure although the Stanislavsky approach to character was deemed fairly incompatible with the experimental methods by several of the cast.²⁵⁴ Four weeks was not enough time to fully develop these new approaches with the cast.

The Use of 'Energy'

One of the first concepts to be established with the cast was that of 'energy'. This is a defining key to the exercises developed in this project. Both Michael Chekhov and Stanislavski talk about energy in different ways,

²⁵⁴ One claimed that this approach by-passed the mind whereas the Stanislavsky approach or 'method' required conscious use of the mind in the creation and construction of character.

referring to it as 'prana', 'atmospheres' or 'radiation'. Yoga and eastern martial arts talk about 'chi' and scientists have analysed energy forms in much more complex terms. As a group we came to an understanding of energy as a river of 'forces' that run not only through the human being but also through everything surrounding us from the rehearsal room to the sound to the air. This understanding of 'energy' is basically very shamanic which was very useful when the work with Sue Ingleton developed the notion of shamanic approaches to theatre further in her workshops.

The key to working with energy in this way is trust in the body. This does not simply mean the physical or emotional but also the astral and etheric. These are the areas in which the actors were challenged the most. The astral body is described by A.E. Powell as body of energy not unlike the shape of the physical body it is attached to but not visible to the human eye.²⁵⁵ The astral body is what we use to travel out of body in, as in dreams. The major difference between the astral and the physical is the density of the energy. Astral energy is much finer and able to penetrate the physical state. Although it has not been proven, Powell suggests that astral atoms are electrons.²⁵⁶ The astral body extends about 30 cm beyond the physical body. The concept of a phantom limb is, according to Powell, the result of the astral body's counterpart of the limb still being felt as it has not been severed. The dream state as experienced by our astral body is also a memory of 'feeling' beyond the body. Although the term 'astral' was not often used in rehearsal the cast had a clearer understanding of the energy state they were tapping into when they were on a shamanic meditation journey.

²⁵⁵ Powell:1882:1-10 (3rd Edition)

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.5

Powell's book on the Astral Body also assisted in the understanding (or languaging) of the ability an actor has to 'reach into' and affect the world of the audience, to touch an audience member with their projected energy. Powell describes this ability as the radiation of vibrations connected to thought forms.²⁵⁷ He describes how 'radiating thought forms' create seas of thoughts that we wander through daily and that visions and apparitions are actually manifestations of very strong thought forms. The application of this information for the actor is the potential ability to consciously send thought forms into the audience via the astral body. When Powell states:

"In fact, there are on the astral plane vast numbers of thought forms of a comparatively permanent character, often the result of the cumulative work of generations of people."²⁵⁸

Powell could well be referring to an aspect of Jung's notion of collective unconscious. Accordingly, the more an actor dwells in the thought forms of their character, the stronger these forms become. The exercise of shamanic meditational journeying engages the astral body of the actor to explore the nature of the character.

Chekhov's technique of radiation is very similar to the exercise of 'projecting energy' the actors engaged in during rehearsal as a way of understanding the potency of conscious use of energy during performance. There was not enough time to completely develop this particular exercise in this production it is included in the following section as it forms a strong part of the underlying principles to this project.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.44

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.54

Exercises Developed in the Rehearsal

1. 'Projecting Energy' / Projections.
 - Radiating Exercise.
2. The Use of Chakras.
 - Chakra Breathing exercise.
 - Walking through the chakras.
 - Delivering text through the different chakras.
3. The Wave (taken from Gabrielle Roth's Map to Ecstasy).
4. The Use of Channelling.
 - Channelling Exercises.
5. Working Shamanically with Actors.
 - Greeting the Forces.
 - Shamanic Meditational Journeying.
6. Use of Tarot/Animal cards in rehearsals

The actors used these exercises to journey into depths of character; to construct the 'under layer' of character through specific selection of chakras (determining which energy centres in that character are open or closed); channelling other aspects of self through the framework of the character, and to open their central energy to the channelling of 'forces' around. These forces include the energies of the audience which are considerable and require an alert actor's antennae to pick up and interpret.

1. 'Projecting Energy'/Projections.

Powell states that "The language of the astral world is thought-transference."²⁵⁹

Each definite thought produces:

- a) a radiating vibration,
- b) a floating form.

• Radiating Exercise

With these concepts in mind the actors enter an empty room and form pairs. They sit opposite each other with their backs against the walls (approx. 7-10 metres apart), facing each other with eyes open to begin with. There is no verbal communication during this exercise. Once deep eye contact is established the eyes are closed. One side then attempts to 'send' an image to the other over a time of approximately three to five minutes. The image involves a colour and a shape, for instance, a blue circle, a green jagged triangle, etc. When the sender has exhausted her ability to project the image she opens her eyes and waits for her partner to do the same. When everyone has their eyes open the partners then come together in the centre of the room and share their experiences. This then opens up into a group sharing of the results.

Often the first time gets mixed results and it isn't until the third or fourth time that the receivers actually receive exactly the image they're being sent. The first time I experimented with this exercise was in 1994 with the cast of *Hedda Gabler*. After three attempts at this exercise the majority of

²⁵⁹ Powell:1983:34

participants (80%) were receiving exactly what was being sent to them. The other 20% had varying levels of reception such as receiving the colour not the shape or vice versa.

As Powell states:

“This radiating vibration tends to reproduce its own rate of motion in any mental body on which it may impinge i.e. to produce thoughts of the same type as those from which the vibration originated.”²⁶⁰

Depending on the source of the vibration and what's in its' way, the thought will affect others to varying degrees. These thought forms that are created by the mental/astral have a life of their own as long as they are being contemplated, received and added to. Although the audience does not go through this training with the actor, the assumption is that these consciously projected thought forms or 'radiations' will have some affect on the audience on a non-verbal and astral level.

To access the state from which radiation is best achieved, the actor must relax as any mental distractions tend to create blockages. Exercises of meditation or yoga are often good warm ups to the above exercise as well as good preparations for rehearsal in general. The benefit of this kind of exercise to the actor is one of enhancing actor-audience connection. If the actor develops their ability to 'project' focused, designed energies and intentions out to the audience, a 'bridge' of energy is established between them. It then becomes easier for the audience to enter the world of the play

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.44

as a participant, sharing the altered reality and being truly affected on all levels.

2. The Use of Chakras

The chakras are the mechanism through which communication between the higher, 'etheric' bodies and the physical body occurs. The 'chakra' is represented in Indian Arts, Sculptures, Yoga and Tantra philosophy of India and is used to explain spiritual or divine centres in the human body, which can be invoked through yogas to experience heightened experiences and enlightenment of the human life. The chakras are doors to the inner worlds. As a person develops and opens each chakra, they open to the level of consciousness that chakra is related to. What a person is (or in theatre terms 'a character') is shown in their chakras; the development of the chakras, the purity of the chakras and which chakras you function through tell a great deal about the individual. There are seven major chakras:

1. Root
2. Sacral
3. Solar Plexus
4. Heart
5. Throat
6. Third Eye
7. Crown

The root chakra located at the base of the spine has the slowest vibration and deals with the lower self whereas the crown chakra, located at the top of the head has the highest vibration and relates to the higher self or

connection to 'god'. The actor moving through the energies of the seven chakras would certainly experience a movement within from coarse to subtle as well as finding 'form and structure to the inner search'.²⁶¹ In terms of psychological functions, the three lower chakras are related to our raw emotions and biological instincts ranging from sexual desire and hunger, into passion, anger, pleasure and joy and other relatively simple emotional states. The four higher chakras are related to higher cognitive states. Thus the heart chakra is related to empathy and understanding. The throat chakra is related to vocal expression, hearing, and the ability to communicate. The third eye chakra is related to discriminative cognition and the ability to understand. The crown chakra is also related to understanding and comprehension, but as well serves as an integrative factor, and is thus related to the gestalt nature of the mind. The notion of the chakras actually defines a sophisticated means of classifying human physiological and psychological functioning into one integrated framework.

Exercises based on the 'chakra' system can be used to develop characters. For example, an actor engaging in heart and third eye chakras can produce a caring, visionary character. Spleen and root can produce a basic, violent and sexually motivated character. Crown alone can produce an 'off the planet' character. The ideal would be for actors to become 'user friendly' with these energy centres in their body, dancing from one to the other in response to other characters, text and actions. The voice is quite notably affected when an actor speaks from different chakras. As a side bonus, having a balanced chakra system also benefits health.²⁶² The basic exercise for introducing the

²⁶¹ Wolford *The Drama Review*, Spring 1996:135

²⁶² "Where they are undeveloped they glow dully and the etheric particles move

actor to these energy centres in the body is one using the breath that is derived from Gabrielle Roth's work with the Map To Ecstasy experienced by Sue Ingleton when she worked with Gabrielle Roth in New York in 1988. Sue passed this exercise onto us at a workshop on Soul Purpose Mountain, N.S.W. in December 1998. There is a special tape created by Gabrielle Roth of music and exercise which lasts approximately 30 minutes.

One important consideration when working with the chakras is the underlying emotional and mental 'baggage' that is often stored in these centres. Clearly, actors and trainee actors are already in emotionally vulnerable situations as is the nature of their work. In fact, the 'Method' has been held responsible in the United States for many emotional breakdowns including the famous case of Marilyn Monroe. Grotowski's actors were also at risk emotionally and at least three are known to have committed suicide.²⁶³ This is a tricky area, the stability of the actor in the first case, the training methods engaged in and the safeguards in place are all factors to consider. In the case of the project for this thesis much of this concern was addressed in the initial interview. As all of the actors chosen had experienced this kind of work and the resulting emotional release before, the concerns were minimalised. I would not recommend directors and actors launching into this kind of work without careful consideration of these factors as the initial shock of the energies released can be quite unsettling. This is where Gabrielle Roth's exercise 'The Wave' became

sluggishly, just forming the vortex necessary for the transmission of the force, and no more: in developed people, on the other hand, the chakras glow and pulsate, blazing with blinding brilliance like miniature suns" (Powell quoting Leadbeater in *The Etheric Double*: 1983).

²⁶³ This information was given to me by a KISS actor who had trained with Grotowski in Poland for seven years.

invaluable. As described further on in this chapter, this exercise allowed the actors to release their emotional energy safely as well as to exercise the energy centres (chakras) connected to each emotion. I believe this exercise looked after a very important element of this work. The actors were no longer afraid of the power of their emotions by the end of the rehearsal period and as a result offered far more in performance.

There are a few theatre practitioners today working with the idea of integrating aspects of the spiritual with actor training and performance development. One is Barbara Sellers-Young, a theatre movement specialist working presently in the Dramatic Arts Department at the University of California. She is currently exploring the potential of chakra work with psychological gesture:

"One way of expanding potential choices is to combine work with the concept of psychological gesture with the emotional centres (chakras). Emotional centres are in some circles referred to as that area from the head to the pelvis in which particular psycho-emotional impulses originate. Recently there has evolved a system of incorporating emotional centres into performance training based on the Hindu system of organising the body into different chakras."²⁶⁴

The study and understanding of chakras provides actors and director with a common language in the rehearsal room. To be able to identify a characters' centres of energy via the chakras makes the process of exploring the energy of the character a faster and easier one. It also enables the director to identify more quickly the centres of the body particular moments in the script could be played from. For example, Hedda was developed as mostly

²⁶⁴ Extract from a paper given by Sellers-Young at the 'Female Principle' Conference, University of Texas, Arlington, April 2000.

third eye and solar plexus energy centres, however, when Lovberg appears, her sacral and heart energy centres are activated which opens up the sexual energy and loving energies. When in the company of Brack her solar plexus is stronger and when with Tessman her third eye takes over. Each line of text can be spoken through a different energy centre depending on the context.

- **Chakra Breathing exercise**

This exercise should be done each day of the rehearsal before any other exercises. The actor begins with their feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, focusing their energy on the root chakra and breathing in a fast rhythmical way through the mouth only. In their mind the actor is connecting this root chakra with the breath. After approximately four minutes the music raises in pitch and the actor moves to the sacral chakra and repeats the same breathing technique. (The music raises in pitch every time a new chakra is focused on). Each chakra has a specific colour attached to it which the actor is encouraged to visualise as well. After the sacral chakra the actor moves their breath and consciousness to the solar plexus chakra, then the heart, throat, third eye and crown. By the time the actor is breathing into the crown chakra with rapid series of breaths they are in an altered state and experience a very high and often blissful sensation. After four minutes in this state the music changes and the actor has two minutes to breathe down through each chakra, finishing with the root chakra. At this point the actor collapses slowly onto the ground taking one minute to gather themselves before the whole process is repeated twice.

If this exercise is engaged in each day by the actor the within a week they are usually able to locate each centre visually and with the breath. Then the fun begins as improvisations around each chakra are developed for the character. Delivering text from each chakra is one way to locate the character's energy states at various points of the play.

- **Walking through the Chakras**

The actor walks towards the rest of the group as themselves, experiencing and feeling the impulses, rhythms and centres of balance. Then the same thing the second time using the root chakra, then the sacral chakra and so on until they have walked through all seven chakras. Each time the actor uses the breath to focus on the particular chakra they are using to walk with. The breath moves in and out of this area consciously and the actor surrenders to that section of their body, allowing full impulse for their walk to come from that chakra. There is no use of voice at this stage.

After the seven chakras are walked through, the actor then determines a chakra they think their character might come from and again walks toward the group focusing on this character. I then ask the actors to stay in character so I can see how different the postures are and where the energy centres are in the character. The exercise finishes with the actors moving around the room in character with focus on that same chakra. When they come across each other they stand facing each other, silently taking in the energy of each others' character so they can give feedback after the exercise.

Discussion and Feedback

After 20 minutes or so the actors shake out, jumping up and down on the spot and move into a circle where they sit and discuss the effects of the exercise. This is unusual for actors to have the space to discuss what they're doing with their characters inside the rehearsal time. In more traditional western rehearsal processes, there is no time for actors to reflect as a group on their characters. It's often considered a part of the actors' 'job' to construct a character with little or no discussion with the other actors or the director. It's possibly the nature of the work, being a new approach etc. that it's important for the actor to share the process here. I found the results of group discussion and feedback enormously productive for the actors. It reduced fear levels and validated the work in a way that strengthened the actors' confidence in making strong choices in future rehearsals.

- **Delivering text through the different chakras**

The actors choose several sections of text they feel best demonstrate core aspects of the character. The sections should only be one or two sentences. The actors then move into character, choose a chakra and speak their text out loud through the energy centre of that chakra as they move randomly around the space. When the actor feels connected with the text and chakra they then offer the text to other actors. When an actor is receiving text from another actor they simply listen in character and either respond or move on. After 5 to 10 minutes, the actors change the chakra but not the text. This is repeated until at least three chakras have been experienced with the

same text. Then the actor selects another piece of text and explores it in the same way. This exercise can vary in time from 30 minutes to an hour.

Again a feedback session is held for 10 to 15 minutes after the exercise where actors and director talk about the effects of the voice through the different chakras. Through questions and feedback to each other the actors learn very quickly what the effect of using the voice through different energy centres is on others as well as themselves. I would imagine that over several productions or months the feedback sessions would become less as the exercises become more familiar.

3. The Wave from Gabrielle Roth's Map to Ecstasy

Introduced to us by Suzanne Ingleton the Wave was taught to the actors of *Alabama Rain* over the three day workshop. After a warm up which usually included 30-40 minutes of chakra breathing, the actors would spend 45 -50 minutes on the Wave. The five stages of the wave are designed to move the actor through their chakras and emotions in a journey of discovery of self. The first stage involves the first and second chakras with which the emotion of fear and the element of water is associated. The movement is flowing and spontaneous. The breath is consciously used through these two chakras. The following stages move the actor through the rest of the chakras and their accompanying emotions via different qualities of movement as shown in the chart below.

1st Stage	2nd Stage	3rd Stage	4th Stage	5th Stage
Flowing	Staccato	chaos	lyrical	Stillness
Fear	Anger	sadness	joy	Ecstasy
Chakra 1, 2	chakra 3	chakra 1, 2, 3	chakra 4, 5	Chakra 6, 7
Breath in, out	breath out	breath in, out	breath	Breath
Water	Fire	fire, earth, water	air	Light

By the end of the Wave, the actors are exhausted, physically and emotionally. The Wave is one of the few exercises I have come across that allows the actor a safe and structured exploration of their emotions in a way that brings them to a level of artistic control of this vital sector of the actors craft. Once the actor feels safe in the known regions of their emotions they are then more likely to hand over and surrender to the higher self. It is possible that the fear of possession and surrendering to be possessed comes from a fear of the unexplored or unknown emotions that might arise in such an event. Sue Ingleton reminded us of the key to this work:

“The process of the shamanic work is to bring the energy into the body. The body is the great teacher and we have to surrender the mind to that and let the body teach us. The higher self provides the impetus and the impervious which is the information and higher self is that spirit energy that we connect with, so a lot of the work is to release the mind from the responsibility of having to think of what to do, its more that the mind has to learn to surrender and go with the flow.”²⁶⁵

The Wave really exercised the actors’ emotional palates to a wonderful degree. They also said that every day was too much because it exhausted them emotionally. What I did find was that the effect of it was a

²⁶⁵ Sue Ingleton workshop with actors of “Alabama Rain”, Soul Purpose Mountain, NSW December 1998.

comfortable respect and response to their emotional sides that might not have been tested until opening night. Some actors are afraid of revealing their emotional side, investigating and stretching it and looking at it in a way that will enhance their control and use of the emotional state on stage. The Wave asks them to delve into their fear, anger, sadness and joy, to dance it and to move it and to locate what part of the body this emotion comes from. I think it gives the actor a lot of wonderful tools and at the same time should be used sparingly.

4. The Use of Channelling

“As you channel you build a bridge to the higher realms.....a purposeful collective higher consciousness. Channelling involves consciously shifting your mind and mental space in order to achieve an altered state of consciousness called a ‘trance’.”²⁶⁶

Channelling has largely been seen as a technique often used by spiritualists, mediums and shamans to ‘bring through’ (manifest or realise) another energy state often identified as ‘spirit’ or ‘entity’ for the purpose of bringing messages of wisdom to the tribe from a ‘higher state of being’, or to bring about healing for the tribe or an individual. In the production of “Alabama Rain” we explored the notion of channelling as an acting exercise aimed towards the development of, in Grotowski's terms, a ‘total act’ of character. In reflection it's possible that the channelling exercises also helped to, in Chekhov's terms, “open the doors to hidden vaults.”²⁶⁷ Through channelling the inner state of the actor is radically transformed. As a result the more physical aspects of the body (such as voice, posture, gesture and

²⁶⁶ Roman/Packer:1987:13

²⁶⁷ Chekhov:1953:17

facial mask) also become transformed. Each actor was videoed as they 'channelled' or called up their character from the depths and then viewed their 'transformation' in their own time and space. Transformations certainly took place as the actors' faces, postures and voices in particular took on extraordinary forms...ones we hadn't seen before. Perhaps the greatest benefit from the channelling exercise readily seen by all was the courage and trust it gave the actors. Their ability to go with the flow from within improved and after observing themselves channelling on the video realised that the character was indeed within them if they can only step aside to let the character through. Channelling is an exercise that asks the actor to come from a deeper place. The actor has an opportunity to surrender to a greater inner force (some might say the higher self) that creates a transformation of the energy within.

An actor channelling might be regarded as communing with their 'higher selves' rather than 'another'. That is, the various 'spirits' or 'personalities' are seen as colours of the actors' make-up previously untapped. Therefore when the actor channels they are owning the experience as a product of their imagination or higher self rather than the entering of other entities into their body.

At least one to two weeks of working with the chakras is advisable before moving into the channelling exercise as the body needs to be fairly free from extra mind and emotional clutter. The actor also needs to know the play and given circumstances. In other words, to have programmed their vehicles with the necessary data with which the 'higher self' can work.

"The feeling is amazing, (channelling) you are like a puppet in your own body allowing something to move you. Yet it is a part of you that has been awakened that is in control. It makes you wonder just what is possible."²⁶⁸

- **Channelling Exercises**

This exercise is best after some warm up exercises that relax the actors' body. Usually done after the chakra breathing exercises and the Wave but not immediately after. The actor channelling sits in a chair with both feet on the ground (not crossed). They put their grounding cord down through their feet and base of spine into the centre of the earth. This is an important grounding process and should not be left out of the exercise. The actor observes their breath coming through the crown, (top of the head) to the root, (base of the spine) then calls in their character as created by the higher self as though its a spirit form that they're channelling. The actor surrenders her vessel over completely to this energy and just lets it talk. The following is an example of what I say to an actor who is preparing to channel:

"The character is taking over your body and speaking through your voice box and using your body. They are a different being. They will use your body very differently to the way you would use it. They might tire you out hugely because they will use a set of muscles you don't normally use...But try not to judge it and to allow the face to fall around whatever it is coming through you."²⁶⁹

Either the director or another actor then asks the character a series of questions about themselves. the actor channelling tries not to think but to

²⁶⁸ Student Actor, Zoe Scrogings in *Hedda Gabler*, 1994.

²⁶⁹ Jade McCutcheon, rehearsals of *Alabama Rain* 1999.

let the words come without thought. This is a similar process to the existentialists exercise of automatic writing which many artists belonging to that group were fond of, particularly Artaud. One picks up a pen and places it on the paper allowing the hand to move without thinking. The art of the channelling exercise is to stop conscious thought and to let another aspect of self take over to provide information that is stored in deeper, less familiar parts of the body and mind.

There have been concerns voiced regarding the safety and reliability of an actor channelling or in trance during performance. This is an interesting area. It is assumed that a person in trance or channelling isn't aware of what they are doing or doesn't have control over what they're doing. Schechner looks at this area quite closely in his book *Between Theatre and Anthropology*:

"We might even say that there are two kinds of transportations, the voluntary and the involuntary, and that character acting belongs to the first category and and trance to the second."²⁷⁰

Although recognising these categories he comments that the real difference between these two kinds of performance is more in the "labelling, framing and cultural expectations than in their performance processes".²⁷¹ Schechner has also observed many trance performances where the performers are conscious of their actions while performing them. This is also true of the actor while channelling; they are aware of what their character says and does. The results of this particular exercise can be seen on

²⁷⁰ Schechner 1985:127

²⁷¹ *ibid.*

the video accompanying this chapter. Please also see the appendix on channelling for comments and feedback from actors.

5. Working Shamanically with Actors

The anthropological aspects of shamanism are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. This section addresses the more contemporary engagement with the notion of a shaman by an actor. The approach taken for this and previous projects using these techniques is that a contemporary shaman uses the forces around her/him to perform actions on behalf of the tribe or audience. Serge Kahili King who has a doctorate in psychology and has trained with master shamans from Africa to Hawaii makes the following observations of the training processes for contemporary shamans.

"The process would emphasise self-esteem, inner authority, and the power of words to direct energy, evoke imagery, and create beliefs."²⁷²

We could apply these aspects resulting from the process of becoming a shaman to what is desirable for an actor to develop in their process of training. The actor as shaman is a viable concept today and one we based most of this new approach to training on. The actors for "Alabama Rain" did engage with more ritualised shamanic exercises with Sue Ingleton over a period of three days. One of the exercises went as follows:

- **Greeting the Forces**

The actors all chose small objects of worth and meaning to them such as rings, stones, necklaces etc. and worn them to this ritual as costume. They

²⁷² King:1990:27

then set off with Sue into the bush, up the side of a mountain to a clearing half way up. As the sun set the group built a fire and placed a candle in each of the four directions, North, South, East, West. After sunset they moved in single file to each candle, lighting it and calling out to the totem animal connected with each direction. The group then sat around the fire and called on the attending spirits and forces to assist them on their quest. The ritual extended into early morning and had a strong affect on all participants. The objects the actors had chosen to wear for this ritual remained with them throughout the rehearsal period as 'power objects', reminding them of the assistance available from the surrounding unseen forces they had experienced on that night.

From a 'masculinist' point of view this ritual holds very little value as it reaches specifically the 'feminine' in the participant. A dominant patriarchal voice does not exist in the discourse of such a ritual, therefore these kinds of rituals have been trivialised and along with meditation, yoga and other more 'spiritual' practices, left out of the education system as well as the mainstream actor training systems. It is important for the 'receptive other' in the actor to be not only reached but identified, clarified and validated by such exercises that allow the actor to discover their inner senses and imaginations.

- **Shamanic Meditation Journeying**

These are exercises based on shamanic trance rituals which alter the individuals' energy states whilst maintaining an awareness. Various exercises were created involving a type of creative visualisation shamanic

meditation for the actor who journeys to discover and meet their character. One example of a shamanic meditation journey is, after entering a state of relaxation through whatever methods are appropriate,²⁷³ an actor would enter into a world constructed by another part of their mind on behalf of the character; ie. not a pre-designed space but one that arrives spontaneously for the character to exist in. As they enter into this space through the trunk of a tree, their character is waiting there for them. The character either enters the actor or takes them by the hand and leads the actor through the landscape of the world of the play. This is a space where the character will teach the actor about themselves and other characters in the play. The actor is called back after 30 -40 minutes and immediately writes down the information they received. They then share some of their story with the rest of the group. Often information gained in this way is incorporated into the production. For example, on one journey, the actress playing Laurie Laurie experienced a Sunday at church with the family. The actor was so taken by her mother and aunts' singing of hymns; both in very high out of tune voices trying to outdo each other, that she adopted this style of singing for her character in the production.

To shamanically 'visit' the sites of the play and to feel the environment assists the actor in the creation of another reality. The actors smell the aromas of the kitchen, the dusty surrounds, the lack of water. They feel what it's like to be afraid of the well so that when they all have to visit the well in Act 3 their senses are tuned to the state of fear and the consequent

²⁷³ In the *Alabama Rain* rehearsals, I would usually take the actors through some fairly strenuous exercises for an hour or more then talk them through relaxing images while they lay on the floor. Often music would be playing in the background.

revelation and release. The meditation journey on 'Fear in the Well' went as follows:

Relax your body.

Let the body breathe by itself, not consciously.

Observe your body breathing.

Bring the character up on an imaginary screen in front of you. Note the age.

Tell your character (mentally) you're taking her on a journey, tell her its 'below'.

Take her by the hands and pull her into your body.

Become her, breathe her.

Walk backwards to the sound of drumming, you are alone and going to the well.

It's cold, the path is receding.

Hot breath on the back of your neck as you're standing at the edge of the well.

You begin your descent into the well down the ladder rung by rung.

It's getting colder and darker, you look up and see the entrance, it's very small.

You reach the bottom, there's something down there.....

From this point on, the actors all experienced varying degrees of fear as they explored the well in their imagination. As a result of this journey , an enormous amount of material was generated as background information, given circumstances, for the characters who feared the well.

The importance of ritual and ceremony is highlighted for the actor as well as connecting with the earth via the rituals. This links the actor's energy to the energy of the earth and provides profound material for the work the actor is engaged in.

Perhaps the best information on these journeys is by way of reports and feedback from the actors and assistant directors involved in past productions. Please refer to the Appendix for these. It has been more difficult to obtain written feedback from *Alabama Rain* actors as the video documentary process was intended to supply this information rather than asking for written responses.

6. Use of Tarot/animal cards in rehearsals

As many contemporary Tarot decks use language away from dominant discourse,²⁷⁴ they are ideal for use as catalyst for the journey within. This is basically drawing on a technique often used in Psychology as the 'Projective Technique'. A technique which is based on the Freudian-Jungian assumption of subconscious mental activity within an unconscious part of the psyche, where memories and desires are kept hidden, not directly accessible to consciousness because of ego restraints. Freud and Jung believed that the contents of the unconscious could only be brought into consciousness through the removal of these ego defences. Freud developed his psychoanalytic theory around this premise, using both free association and dream analysis to locate and bring forth material from the unconscious that was believed to influence the conscious behaviours of individuals. Of

²⁷⁴ For example; the *Motherpeace Deck* and the *Sacred Path Cards*.

course Jung further identified what he termed a personal unconscious, as different from what he called the collective unconscious, this latter being evolved through racial experience and thought, more deeply seated than the personal unconscious, and expressed in a universal symbolic language not easily understood by the conscious mind. Modern psychologists often use projective-type tests to facilitate unconscious uncovering; these generally involve the use of pictures or abstract images to elicit expression of unconscious material. As a rehearsal technique the actors would draw a card from the deck on any day of rehearsal and use it to inspire an aspect of their work that day. For instance in the production of *The Golden Age* (1996), the actor playing Betsheb drew an animal card of the deer and based her movement of the character on that animal.

7. Reflections on the Rehearsal Process

One of the key considerations of the nature of this work is that it is not intended to stand alone as an acting or rehearsal technique. It is the beginning of a development to create exercises and approaches connecting with the spiritual, shamanic and ritualistic aspects of theatre. As Richard Schechner points out:

“Generally, scholars have paid attention to the show, not to the whole seven-part sequence of training, workshops, rehearsals, warm ups, performance, cool-down and aftermath.”²⁷⁵

This approach to theatre asks the actors and director to consider the vital importance of each segment in the whole sequence as one might regard the steps involved in a sacred ritual. The actor still needs to understand the

²⁷⁵ Schechner:1989:16

given circumstances of the play as in most acting techniques. Research and analysis of the text gives the actor the blueprint upon which the 'higher self' of the actor can build. The main areas of difference to more traditional actor training approaches lie in:

1. The surrender by the actor to the design of the character by the higher self.
2. The strong focus on exercising the emotional states through both the Chakra exercises and the Wave Exercise. This ensures a high degree of knowledge and skill in the actors' use of each of the emotions. The result facilitates the surrender of the actor to the higher self as they have fully explored the emotional realm and lost their fear of being out of control.
3. The transaction of energy between the audience and the actor is seen as a real and controllable site. The actor develops techniques of sending energy forth to the audience and opening up in such a way as to connect more deeply with audience and allowing audience to connect more deeply with them.

The main problem area with this approach to acting is connecting the learnt text to the 'altered' state of the actor while channelling or consciously engaging their chakras. I feel this would be helped by a longer training period of several months for the actor to learn how to use their chakras and to channel so that their reflexes in these areas are more instinctive. The text can then be dealt with in a less pressured way. It was definitely a stretch for the actors to learn such demanding techniques as well as text, blocking and interpretation of the play. The time spent on this project was not long

enough to develop exercises that would enhance an actors' ability to work with the energies between themselves and the audience, although, at the end of the accompanying video some of the actors do refer to their 'contact' with the audience. The most desirable outcome would be that the majority of actor training institutions and directors introduce these exercises for training the 'receptive other' in the actor along with the more traditional methods employed. If that happened, rehearsal time would not be so consumed with the training of the actor on these other levels.

- **What Worked**

At this stage, I observe the following exercises to have varying degrees of effectiveness in the development of the actor's ability to:

- Portray the character as a real entity.
- 'Touch'²⁷⁶ the audience.
- Create a multi-dimensional landscape of the play in their projections of character.
- Dynamically interact with each other on stage.

Those exercises most successful in achieving the above were:

Shamanic Meditational Journeying

This helped the actor to create a multi-dimensional landscape of the play on stage through images and information received on the journey which were recorded into the actor's log and on video.

²⁷⁶ To 'touch' the audience is to alter the state of the audience and to share the altered space.

Chakra breathing

Through vitalising these centres of energy in the body, the actor understands how to use these centres to expand their energy on stage and to touch both the other actor and the audience.

The Wave

Great for fitness, specifically effective in exercising the emotional palette of the actor, creating a richer character.

- **What Didn't Work**

Channelling

Although very successful as a tool to familiarise the actor with the character, channelling has proven to be the most difficult exercise to incorporate in performance. In rehearsal, when the actor channels the character, they become transformed, in face, voice and physique. However, they often did not remember the entire experience and found it nearly impossible to remember the text during the channelling. The most useful aspect of this exercise is the confidence it gives the actor to surrender to a more inner instinct and knowing. It is also possible the subconscious memory of the character remains with the actor and effects the actor's portrayal of the character on stage. Basically, this exercise will need a great deal of exploration in the future.

Radiating

This exercise encouraged the actors to consider the conscious levels of energy they were sending to the audience. It also proved to the actors that energy was a tangible essence that carried intentions from person to the other. After only three or four attempts at this exercise, the actors found that the colour and shape sent to them by the actor opposite (about 6 metres away) was received exactly as intended. For instance, a yellow star, a green circle. Eventually, I see this exercise as a functional technique during performance in which the actor will consciously radiate energy to the audience. At the stage of this writing, the actors are still grappling with using the chakras, playing objectives and surrendering to the character. I see time as a huge factor in the marrying of these techniques to the existent ones.

Conclusion

"As practised throughout the world today, the stage rehearsal is perhaps the greatest area in which the theatre has remained at a standstill."

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When we consider the amount of experimentation, practitioners like Stanislavsky, Chekhov, Artaud and Grotowski engaged in to develop their theories, approaches and exercises, it's puzzling to observe the lack of such exploration within our current actor training institutions. Add to this loss of exploration the loss of any reference to 'higher self' or 'soul' and the sites of actor training and rehearsal do indeed appear to have remained "at a standstill".²⁷⁸ The creative state of the actor is a complex notion. It carries with it, not only the challenge to drop the mask of the socialised being, but also serves as an opening to the many 'forces' within. An actor recognising the entrance to their more 'unconscious' states is in a more powerful position in terms of accessing their creative 'vaults' than one who is merely focusing on the known and 'conscious' states. Stanislavsky and Chekhov clearly recognised the value of tapping into the deeper aspects of self beyond the physical and emotional. They both pioneered entry into the spiritual beyond the church by identifying such concepts as the 'higher I', prana, radiation, meditation and yoga for use in actor training.

²⁷⁷ Chekhov:1985:85.

²⁷⁸ Although practitioners like Eugenio Barba and Richard Schechner have dedicated an enormous part of their lives to explore and develop further the areas of actor training and rehearsal, very little of the resulting literature furthers the development of an actor's inner states beyond the emotional self.

Why isn't this work been developed today and why is there resistance in the mainstream actor training institutions to investigate this work further? My thoughts on this are situated in Chapter Three suggesting a deep seated fear within the culture itself that results in the exclusion of the spiritual voice not created from the dogma of masculine - voiced religions. The spiritual voice outside the realms of church is disempowered and has no place or recognition in mainstream discourse. The language of 'new age' spiritualism is seen as low status, not to be taken seriously by the dominant discourse and therefore carrying no power.

Yet the roots of our theatre, although western, are imbedded in the search for meaning and 'gods'. The Greek theatre called consciously to the unconscious, begging the gods to intervene in the paltry affairs of humankind. Prayers were offered and blessings asked for. Today, the questions of meaning still drive our theatre but with a more internalised concept of where god or gods might exist.

The actor is our representative in the play of life. Through her we experience, observe, learn and evolve. Whether in theatre, television, film or circus, we, as audience, project ourselves onto the actors' body and into the actors' mind and feelings. One component of the human being to be acknowledged and recognised as part of an important energy exchange between the actor and audience is the unseen energy, the metaphysical, spiritual life of the being. We know we are sensitive to energies surrounding us although we can't see them. We know when a person walks into a room with an 'attitude' that they're unhappy, angry or sad, yet they haven't said a word or done anything other than enter the room. How do we

know this about them? What is a person projecting when we can feel how they're feeling? There must be a world of investigation waiting in this area alone.

Actors have experienced being 'possessed' on stage by their character. Sometimes with consciousness, other times without. The notion of possession has often been attributed to hysterics, the female or the primitive. The 'receptive other' has been feared rather than honoured except by primitive societies. The state of possession is one that accesses another part of self, a lesser known and explored part and certainly a less 'masked' part. An actor using these other 'parts' of self is projecting images from another place, one the society has largely either suppressed or forgotten about.

In the past, the actor has been assisted by varying exercises from Stanislavsky's "Magic If", to Grotowski's rituals and Chekhov's "Higher Self" with the common objectives of taking the actor past her/himself into the creative state from which a greater quality of performance will emerge and aid the actor in the creation of another reality. These spiritual and shamanic exercises attempt to address the same concern. They ask the actor to engage in exercises that will access them to their deeper creative states.

The Shamanic Meditation Journeying trains the actor to enter deeply into their imagination, to learn to trust what comes up as information from these journeys and to apply their experience of character in these deeper

realms to their performance. If we look at the following section from a journey recorded by the actor playing RACHEL in *Alabama Rain* it's clear that she is able to draw on the information provided by the journey while she is onstage.

“ I walked into the kitchen and Pheenie was baking, then I looked outside because you said look for the well, so I looked outside and there was this barn outside and I looked at Pheenie who nodded her head and I went outside down the stairs. There were really old, white rickety stairs at the back and this white gauze door....I went to look in the barn but I was really scared because I knew it would be dark inside.....there was nothing there really just some hay and it wasn't really as dark as I thought it was and then I had to run back for dinner. I came back and I was sitting next to Laurie Laurie and Monty was on my right hand side, we kept giggling and we got in trouble for giggling.”²⁷⁹

When onstage, the actor is able to visualise the house, the barn and what home life is like. She has made the space a tangible habitat through information provided by the journey that did not occur in the text.

One of the benefits of this approach is that of the actor developing aspects of the self past habits and clichés. For example, in the channelling exercise, the actors facial muscles actually change as do the habitual or daily behaviours and actions. Muscles not previously used by the actor are used when they channel. An actor who journeys regularly into the landscape of their imagination where entire worlds offer endless material and ideas will have the opportunity of developing a richer, deeper and I believe, a more interesting and engaging character. Perhaps the most hoped for outcome is

still to be realised, that is a more sacred approach to theatre with a stronger concept of the 'higher self' and 'receptive other' in the actors' mind.

As the actor learns to use the Chakra centres as part of character creation and development as well as a tool for constantly changing responses to other characters they will develop a greater sense of how to use the inner energies alongside the physical energies such as body and voice. The idea of channelling allows the character to emerge through the actor without censorship or interruption from the mind. One of the core issues of the channelling exercise is the difficulty for the actor to completely trust what's happening while they're in an altered state, much more in the subconscious than the conscious.

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "I felt that, I had that problem that Belinda mentioned, my brain kept coming in and it's kind of hard to let go of how you're used to working because I've been trained in a way where you just use the self and nothing else, just emotional recall."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "The parts your own instrument, you can't recall on, like when you asked me what I had for breakfast, the immediate thing I did, because of the way I'm used to working, is to 'oh what did I have for breakfast.....then I caught myself and I thought 'that's not Pheenie'."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "Yeah but I'm finding the other side of that, because that's the way I was trained too, is totally on yourself and then the words are supposed to be like a mask, a thin mask but what I'm finding for me is what Laurie Laurie is going through is a whole lot of stuff that I haven't dealt with myself. And so there's a lot of personal stuff coming up but not that I'm putting it into it, its coming up."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "Yes well there is, I think there always is when you play any character its always reflects what's going on with you personally in your life and there is that stuff that does come into it and it can sort of linger there but you sort of do have to....."²⁸⁰

What Kath and Lee are referring to as the way they've been trained is the Method acting ²⁸¹ they were both exposed to in the United States. Kath trained at Lee Strasberg studios in New York and Lee with Stella Adler studios in L.A. Much of these methods depend on emotion recall (emotional memory) which is a system of using the personal experiences and memories of the actor with which to create the actor. Kath was stating her difficulty with the channelling as a reaction to the training she received which required conscious thought and memory as opposed to total surrender to the information coming from within which doesn't rely on emotion recall. Lee, on the other hand, found that the information coming up through the channelling was very useful and stretched her past her known

²⁸⁰ See Appendix A for full quotes.

self, although she had experienced similar actor training to Kath. This produces the following response by myself.

“Well the character demands often that a muscle has to be flexed for the truth of that character, that you as a person might not have flexed. If you only go with what you think you know as a personal state, then you will probably block out the flexing of that muscle for the character’s sake because it takes a lot of work in a way. If you hand over to a whole other force that works past your thinking, it’ll force a change and it will force you to have to go through that personal change.”

The actor is full of dimensions and depths that are rarely tapped in present western actor training exercises and techniques. The actor is a human being, socially constructed and a product of their family, culture and education. This approach is attempting to reach those depths and dimensions of self that are more universal, beyond some of the conditioning.

These exercises are a continuum of all that has gone before in actor training. As mentioned before, our culture is changing, our consciousness is changing, as are our rituals, religions and concepts of self. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts acknowledge this in their introduction to *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*:

“Indeed it may be that one of the crucial characteristics of a live performance in our time is that, because of its ‘present’ nature, it must constantly search for forms that represent society in times of change....”²⁸²

²⁸¹ Developed by Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler in the 1930’s & 40’s in New York & L.A.
²⁸² Huxley & Witts:1996:7

This research has attempted to develop the potential relationship between actor and audience by developing actors' exercises that invite "real metaphysical inclination"²⁸³ within the actor training methodology. Although the inner world of the actor's imagination has always been acknowledged as a vital tool for the actor, it has yet to be linked to shamanistic uses of energy or centres of energy within the body and how these can be used.

The Relationship of this Research to Industry

At a Symposium on research in theatre studies in 1998 called "The Scholar & the Stage",²⁸⁴ keynote speaker David Berthold (Associate Director of Sydney Theatre Company) suggested to the symposium several practical areas in need of exploration and research:

1. How to vocally construct a particular line. How does the director access this area?
2. A common language is badly needed for the rehearsal room between actors and director.
3. The 'nature' of Australian acting. David spoke of an actress he worked with recently using meditation as part of her approach and style.

²⁸³ Artaud:1994:90-91

²⁸⁴ Held 29 September - 2 October, 1998 in Sydney

4. Need for Australian translations of European plays rather than British translations.
5. Need for effective dramaturges. (Jill Dolan responded with an example of a very effective dramaturgy course existing at Yale).

There was some discussion as to how academia could further serve industry. I feel that points 2 and 3 are of particular concern in relationship to the nature of this project. What I found interesting was David's reluctance to speak further with me about this approach to acting although he had used the example of several actors he had worked with effectively using forms of meditation and yoga in their approach to their acting work. The other practitioners I met and talked to who had used a spiritual or shamanic approach to actor training, such as Sue Ingleton and Annie Stainer,²⁸⁵ experienced a similar reluctance by the industry to formally embrace and acknowledge these ways of working. Is this the language of the 'receptive other' disturbing the dominant discourse of actor training which is so strongly based in patriarchy? Actors so far who have been exposed to these approaches have shown a very strong interest and as the documentary of *Alabama Rain* shows, a strong belief in the effectiveness of these methods.

At the same symposium, Alison Richards gave a report from the National Symposium on Research in the Performing Arts and asked the question:

²⁸⁵ Both Suzanne Ingleton and Annie Stainer have taught students in institutions such as

"How much does, and how much should, university research influence performing arts practice and vice versa?" She also spoke of the poor recognition of arts research and pointed out the importance of performing arts researchers to communicate and preserve research questions for future investigation by others. The opportunities for university research to directly influence industry are unfortunately few and far between. This project has attempted to address both the concerns voiced by David Bertolt and those of Alison Richards. Change in any area does take time. As Susan Bennett writes:

"We have seen how the plays of Pinter & Beckett initially tested the tolerance and expectations of audience, but became accepted as modern classics as the audience became familiar with the necessary receptive strategies."²⁸⁶

Indicating that audiences will adapt over a period to the nature of a new energy in the theatre.

Finally, my own criticisms of aspects of this project include:

- The text. Although we tried to use a sympathetic text for this methodology, a barrier still arose when uttering words that are not one's own when in an altered state. Possibly, the next production using these techniques might be better suited to a devised process with a writer developing the text as we go.

- A longer period of training is needed for the desired result. I suspect at least six weeks of training and then another three/four to work with the text.
- The documentary failed to give a true account of all the exercises. This was due to inexperience of camera operators, myself and the fact that we did not stage any of the rehearsals for the camera. The camera operators were left to film what they could while we were working. I would certainly stage exercises for the camera in future. There is some way to go in terms of acceptance of this language and methods into the mainstream of actor training. Hopefully, more productions and publications on these techniques will move this acceptance forwards.

One of the difficulties with the research side of this project is the lack of material available on other experimental actor training and rehearsal in western theatre. The writings of Grotowski and Barba have certainly provided insights to methods and systems developed within the dominant discourse. Finding any publications on spiritual or shamanic actor training has been very difficult. This is obviously an approach yet to be published.

The Future?

An interesting statement was made by Susan Sarandon recently about her latest film venture and the ritual performed by the director at the beginning of the filming: "When we started Wayne Wang (the director) made an

offering to Buddha to keep everyone safe and to try to find the truth.”²⁸⁷
There is no doubt that the movement in our western culture towards the adoption of Eastern spirituality is filtering into and through our art forms.

This work will continue to develop. Barbara Sellers-Young from the University of California has invited me to work with her over there to workshop and develop the exercises with the hope of creating a book and/or documentary for use by actors, describing these techniques in detail.

This is both an academic and creative thesis. As such, it attempts to embrace, understand and contribute to, the creative ideas within theatre and actor training through various academic disciplines and theories. The tool of imagination has been identified by many actor trainers and directors as a tool the actor can't do without. Imagination is not traditionally an academic concept. It has therefore been challenging to 'academically' critique this non-academic approach to actor training. It is an ongoing process I hope to engage with for many years to come. It's clear that it takes that time to establish a new or different voice. Hopefully, in the future, one of the actor training institutions in Australia or major theatre companies will find this approach interesting enough to enter into experimental works which will engage these processes as part of ongoing research.

²⁸⁷ Susan Sarandon, interview with Adrienne Pielou, *Sunday Magazine*, *Sunday Telegraph*, February 6, 2000, p. 6

Appendix A. Alabama Rain

Shamanic Meditational Journeying

Shamanic Journeys as experienced by the *Alabama Rain* Actors (and recorded on video tape but not included in the documentary)

These are just some of the journeys experienced by the actors during the Shamanic Meditations. These journeys provided the actors with a great deal of sub-text information about their characters, the family they belong to, the surrounds and environment of the play and shared experiences.

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "I hold on to her waist (the characters) and she soars me through the sky.....from high up above I saw the boarding house and the well and then the cemetery and I was swinging on a front gate before I got called to dinner.....and then there was a fence on the other side and beyond that I saw all these skeletons like dead animal skeletons....so it didn't really appeal to me to go out wandering because it was all full of skeletons and death and I thought I might end up like that. I was too scared to go to the well because walking through the cotton was scary.....so I found a big road in the middle of it with lots of corrugations in the dirt....wooden fences, slats and all very old and tumble down grey colour and dried out. That's the landscape I saw."

Belinda Armstrong (RACHEL) - We were laying under the tree and the big bird came over and he dropped a pink quartz crystal in my hand, and so

when I became Rachel she had the crystal in her right hand and a music box in her left hand. And it was white with red flowers and it had red top and she was holding it like there was a wind-up bit but she never wound it, she just carried it with her and I walked up to the verandah and into the house completely unnoticed. I didn't even say hello to Mum, she was just sitting talking to all these boarders and they were men. I walked into the kitchen and Pheenie was baking, then I looked outside because you said look for the well, so I looked outside and there was this barn outside and I looked at Pheenie who nodded her head and I went outside down the stairs. There were really old, white rickety stairs at the back and this white gauze door....I went to look in the barn but I was really scared because I knew it would be dark inside.....there was nothing there really just some hay and it wasn't really as dark as I thought it was and then I had to run back for dinner. I came back and I was sitting next to Laurie Laurie and Monty was on my right hand side, we kept giggling and we got in trouble for giggling. Laurie Laurie got in trouble for not helping Pheenie with dinner and Pheenie got in trouble cause something was too hot. She made something too hot and we were all so embarrassed because there were other people there. There were two men there and so we were all eating with our heads down. I started eating before Mum said the prayer, she didn't yell at me, she just stared at me. We were all just sitting there and I just couldn't wait to eat I was so hungry. She said the prayer and we were all sort of sitting there and then she said the prayer and all of us just sat there with our heads down and she said

'come on girls be nice'.....we were all really uncomfortable and then she took them (the men borders) into the lounge room and Pheenie took Dallas upstairs for a bath. I shared a room with Dallas.....I woke up to a breaking glass sound and our window overlooked, like we could see over the front verandah, over the dirt road and corn fields and stuff and I could hear her (Mum) screaming at this man to get off the property.....then I had dreams of Dad and us being so happy in the house and Dad was home and everything was happy and gold and just beautiful. I was like swimming through the corn fields and flying over the corn fields and I could grab the corn fields and it was just so much fun!! Then I woke up and put on my dress and it was like white lace and had a little bow and things I had to do up and it had these really bright red and yellow and orange plums and flowers on it. And then I went to the well but before I went to the well.....I went into the barn and I caught someone having sex. And I was so scared and so frightened cause both of them turned around and went arghh and I went arghh and I was just running and running....I got to the well and had to climb down into it.....like stairs going down.....it was a big dark hole, like a mining cave and I noticed Laurie Laurie was there and I asked her what she was doing and she said she was doing a spell. And when I asked her what for, she said it's a secret and if I tell the well will take it from me.....but she said I have to have someone with me so we held hands and went down (into the well) and I wasn't so scared because I knew she was there.....and then it was this awful feeling....and I got scared and ran home....I could feel the earth on my feet

and I was scraping all this red stuff on my toe nails.....then I swinging on the swing and that's when I let her go back out (the character) and I said to her 'you've forgotten your crystal and your music box' and she said 'no, they're yours now'."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "I saw beds had mosquito nets over them and I saw a lot of fly wire on the verandah, almost covered the verandah was with fly wire. She's (the character Pheenie) still got the scarf on but when Mother was there I went back to being about a nine year old and I saw my hair at one stage without the scarf.....it was all snipped like in clumps, close to the head.....I had an experience of a sound in the middle of the night, it was birds calling me....it was rather loud....a bit crow-ish."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "It was the wolf, a wolf howling was what woke me up and it was full moon and there was a guy out there with a gun, and he was in love with Mum. But she didn't want anything to do with him and he had a gun and you know he was threatening and violent and there was a lot of tension in the house and I just saw him there shouting, I didn't see how it was resolved or anything, he was just shouting with the gun, spit down his face, very angry, shouting at my Mum".

Tash Beaumont (DALLAS) - ".....I was going to your room and you weren't in bed which I kind of knew you wouldn't be and you were outside dancing with this invisible whatever (Laurie Laurie) and I was sitting on the porch watching you....like a waltz.....I had on a dress today, it was too big for me and

comes to like my knees, faded beige floral dress." "It was a really traditional well this time....like a fairy tale with a bucket....kind of normal...it was very cute, it wasn't very scary. The feeling of fear was like a cliff face, if you get within a couple of feet you start to like 'oh shit,' but when you're a couple of metres away it's no big deal."

Ange Morosin (MONTY-LOU) - "She was blonde with plaits (long) like yesterday. It was a little bit magic faraway tree. It didn't feel like her but it was her."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "....animals running across this dirty, dusty but what really struck me about them was that they were running away from where we were and there was something about that, that kind of had an appeal to me and I thought, it was like I thought 'oh there is a place away from here', up until that point I hadn't had that thought and then to see these animals running away, a lot of stuff went on emotionally around that." "Another big one was the black eyes, because when I saw Laurie Laurie she was there and it was like black tears, like how mascara runs but more than that like black oil almost running down her face."

Belinda Armstrong (RACHEL) - "I had to climb up in the tree and when I got up in the tree I couldn't find her (Laurie Laurie). It was like her spirit was all around me and she said 'see just look out', and there was this beautiful view and then we both sort of flew into this sort of like fairy lights, pink and purple and green and yellow fairy lights."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "I was about 12 or 13 and it was the heart chakra and I kept having dilemmas when I was going through it because it was kind of reaching a very painful place and I felt like I was bringing everybody down and I didn't want to go there fully.

Tash Beaumont (DALLAS) - "...I just got bored, was that collapsed solar plexus or heart it just felt blah (Jade: I think solar plexus does collapse when personal power is engaged in expression in community or in a public sense. I think women particularly collapse their personal power to give the power elsewhere.....).".

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "I got the sense that time stood still when I was born and I grew up thinking that it was my fault and that's why I set out on a journey." (Director's question "to right it?") "Yeah, I felt guilty for it, I know, it's absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with Pheenie but it happened about 30,40 years which is round about how old I am. So that felt that was quite interesting. There was a church, small and it had no door and we were all there but there were no other people there with us, and we were there to pray and I would pray standing up at the back of the church, in the doorway so I could keep an eye on you all, because if I didn't you would try to sneak out, and that's what came so strongly. And the prayer was really short and it's 'may we move' and that's all."

Ange Morosin (MONTY LOU) - "I didn't go to the church, but just go to see the church had no doors and was a white weatherboard church with no roof and no doors. I went to the Well and its hard to describe it found really hard to see in there, yesterday and today are all just meshed but the well felt I was on the edge and I walked into the well and there were lots of stones, river pebbles and it wasn't unpleasant then the well had the same kinds of stones built up around the outside and it was quite damp."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "...it came immediately to me, I went there and put my ear and it was the sound of the ocean, just wave after wave after wave, and it that was really interesting because after Mum died my sister and I wrote poems and that was, the wave was like her dying breath, it kept coming but it stopped and it reminded me cause it was my Mum's birthday, how interesting. The church, it was a little stone thing, very dirty and wooden pews and we were all going there, a bit like Madeline, you know all kind of straggling in one line with Mum and her Mum, Grandma, in front and when we got to the church, when you get to the church no-one ever thinks about not going, its just not the done thing, no-one even thinks about it although I know in my body, I've got the feeling that I don't want to be here and I've got the feeling that all of my sisters are feeling the same thing as well but you just don't and Mum and Grandma just don't. But when they were singing in the church and they were going 'ssshhaaaalllll weeee gaattthhher aaatttt tthhhheeee rriiivvvveerrr' and cracking up laughing at each other, kind of going off at each other in this real kind of

high crazy voice. And I thought ohhh and that sounded just like I imagined Laurie Laurie singing, which was really interesting, taking them off. And then with the voice, the tape was playing all these birds and last night I did all these visualisations and I asked her to come to me and she came as a bird and first of all she was the bird with the broken wing. Then she got stronger and then I started to hear the voice and its got a tweet in it and then there was a part where she was singing, me. I was trying to sing like a bird, and feel my throat and with the lips but in the sound of the voice was the tweeting. And then all this came really quickly to me so I had a whole lot of time, so I thought well okay what am I going to do now - and it was fly and there I was flying and that's the joy because she is dead and she can fly now and I hadn't even thought of all that before so I was just flying. And then the prayer was 'Now I lay me down to sleep bless my soul the Lord to keep, if I should die before I wake bless my soul the Lord to take'. And she said it to me with the voice, with a kind of tweet in it."

Belinda Armstrong (RACHEL) - "We all sort of waddled in (to the church) all holding hands and there weren't many people there and I remember just trying to look at Mother all the time, I was right on the end and there was this big window and I kept trying to get a glance at Mum but I could never see her because Pheenie and Laurie Laurie were always in the way, actually Monty was there first and then Laurie Laurie and Pheenie and I could never see until she stood up to sing and I would stand there and watch her and she turned around and I would just smile that little funny smile that's hers and

then we sat down and the Minister was really old and he had a bald head with grey hair at the back and this huge white coat on with one of those paster things that they wear. I was just staring at him and he was talking about death and I didn't know what he was talking about so I looked out the window and there were all these pink storks flying and then irises. I went outside because I could hear little girl laughter and so I thought, oh this sounds like fun and I just tried to follow them where they were, I went through this little rainforest thing but it wasn't very big, it was quite short and you could see light on the other side and so I walked through it and there was the cemetery and I was just standing there, with this rusty iron things, just with my head (pressed against the iron) going 'heaven's not a really nice if that's where you have to spend it, in the ground'. And then Pheenie came over to me and said you can't keep running off like this, you do this all the time and I get into so much trouble and she knelt down and she was playing with my face and my hands and saying come on, you know, if you ever do that again please tell me where you are so I know where you are cause Mum always gets very angry. We came back and Mother was talking to the Minister and he was saying 'how are the girls' and she was saying 'oh they're fine, they're just fine, just fine, thank you very much for asking' and we walked home and it was Mother, Monty and Pheenie and Laurie Laurie kept changing places all the time, I didn't question that, I just let that happen and I got this feeling that when I was really young I used to hold on to her hand, Pheenie's hand and even when I got older and we were

going to church I still had some sort of hand holding thing happening. And then these boys came past in this old pick up truck, this really old pick up truck and the dust flew up everywhere and they were yelling at Monty because Monty was pregnant. And they were yelling some ya-hoo or something and Mother was like 'look forward girls, keep walking, don't look, don't ever let 'em see you cry Monty' and all the girls were standing there holding each others hands, like freaking out, just holding hands and walking straight and couldn't move. And then I was on the verandah and I heard the well and at first it was a dripping sound and then I just paid no attention and went into the field and I was just surrounded by all these animals, I had a deer and rabbits and I had birds flying around in circles over my head, then the birds sort of went that way and so I followed them and I ended up at the well and I thought I heard Dallas inside the well and she was laughing and giggling, which was the same sound I heard at the church and so I went inside the well and I was just looking around looking for Dallas and I was like this isn't good to be here, nothing's happening. And then I started to get really scared and I started hearing things and hearing, you know that doink doink doink, that water noise and then I heard this (deep) arghhhhh and I was like oh my God and a spider came down and I freaked out and ran back up to the lip but I turned back because I wanted to know what was in there and Rachel just said to me 'its not time for you to know yet' and I was like 'but I, but I want to stay, I want to stay' and she's like 'no you have to go now' and I wanted to stay but she kept pushing me, 'common on you have to

leave', and she goes look 'here's an apple pie, go home'." (Question from one of the group: "so has she gone into you?") "Yeah but it's like I don't have to think or decide about that anymore, she makes that decision for me and...." (the Director: "you just trust whether she takes you by the hand. And how did her voice sound?") "I asked her to talk and she said 'no' (laughing) and I said why not, please, you know, and she said 'don't argue with me I'm too tired', but in her little voice (the Director: "it's so Rachel isn't it?!") " Yeah but I was just like 'how am I supposed to know what you sound like' and she goes 'oohh'. (Question from one of the group: "how's she talk to you if she doesn't use her voice?") "It was like a mind thing, because I was going 'how can I hear you if I can't hear you' but she was just had this, you know like going (making a face) all the time. I know what she sounds like."

Channelling - *Alabama Rain* documentary extract

Ange Morosin (MONTY) - "I felt really heavy, it was good."

Jade - "did you feel safe during it?"

All - "Hmmm, yeah, yes."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "I discovered a mannerism, this felt, I don't know, this felt a really strong mannerism for her (hand lightly caressing throat)."

Jade - "Checking she's still there?"

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "Yeah, close to the throat and heart."

Jade - "What was nice was how shy they all are, you know, and these quirky little smiles that come out on their faces, it's enchanting and there's something just not quite balanced "

Belinda Armstrong (RACHEL) - "it's gone, it's gone, she's.....it's so funny....she's, I don't know, it's like all of her brain is about that big (small) and right at the front of her head and there's nothing else there."

Jade - "Fabulous, yes and you see, I think you can trust to work with that and to develop that part because it will integrate and it will give an interesting colour and difference to the character. Monty was great she was totally...."

Ange Morosin (MONTY LOU) - "Dumb."

The Director - "Yeah" (all laughing).

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE)- "but seriously, it was really interesting."

Jade - "...and what a voice, very very strong."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) -"I knew all your answers too; I just knew you were going to say something around this or this...."

Jade - "yes and Pheenie really surprised me, that huge smile. That was really something, wasn't it?"

Belinda Armstrong/Lee Rickwood- "...and the laugh."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "what laugh? I remember the smile, feeling that it was new to me but what was the laugh?"

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "I think, we're (the sisters in the play) really pretty weird."

Belinda Armstrong (RACHEL) - "I think so too."

Jade - " The differences are so strong, the choices are so strong, but that's what makes it potent."

Lee Rickwood - "But it's not a choice, that's the scary thing about it."

Jade - "Okay, remember every choice is true, everything that comes to you is true, everything the higher self throws up is true, everything that comes through the roses is true, every meditation is true, it's all true, it's just that we've been socialised into not giving any way to account to things we don't read or already know, so there is a whole other part of us at work here and that's what I'm interested in. That's what I want to know. There's a lot of us that is at work on the inner and the trick is to trust it. That's the gap to jump, in a way. It's to allow yourself to be used. I have no doubt that actors channel on stage and they come out of it and they say, 'where have I been? Where are we up to in the text, what have I just said?' And it's usually been the most riveting bit of performance because they've been 100% into it. Now can you do this and remember the text? Can you be in this altered state and deliver the text?"

Ange Morison (MONTY LOU)- "not if Rachel's got a brain the size of a pea!

Belinda Armstrong (RACHEL) - "I could actually feel myself using a different part of my brain and when you asked me what the slogan was, *my* brain started to work and I thought that's Belinda and it was really weird."

Jade - "Yes. you know, there are endless possibilities. You can imagine some people have fear about this because they're so much more afraid of what, of who they are or what the potential of themselves is. They're afraid that some

strange bit will come out and they'll expose themselves in some way that they haven't done before."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "One thing I found was, I thought I was going to have to think of the answer but I didn't, it just kind of came. Cause I was thinking 'oh what's she going to ask me, what am I going to say' and I was just trying not to think like that and concentrate on what was going on and then when you came and asked me it was like it just came, the words just came, so maybe that will happen with the production too."

Ange Morosin (MONTY LOU) - "It was interesting listening to your answers because she (Monty) was thinking (about Laurie Laurie) 'such a wuss, such a baby' she was, all this horrible stuff and I'm going oh, of course, it was not nice." (All laughing)

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE)- "Yeah well that's what I thought (about Monty Lou) you watch she'll answer something really fatty. Favourite food - chocolate or even fattier than what I would have thought of, you know."

Jade - "That's the way sisters think isn't it?"

All agreed

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "I felt that, I had that problem that Belinda mentioned, my brain kept coming in and it's kind of hard to let go of how you're used to working because I've been trained in a way where you just use the self and nothing else, just emotional recall."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "Well it's really hard to let go of and with this work I have discovered, I discovered very early on, that you can't use the

other way with this work, you've got to let go of it completely, you can't even fuse some of your own personal stuff in with this, you just got to trust a total different entity and let go of all the conditioning or the training."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "The parts your own instrument, you can't recall on, like when you asked me what I had for breakfast, the immediate thing I did, because of the way I'm used to working, is to 'oh what did I have for breakfast.....'"

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - " use myself yeah, then I caught myself and I thought 'that's not Pheenie'."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE)- "there's no room for that technique with this."

Lee Rickwood (LAURIE LAURIE) - "Yeah but I'm finding the other side of that, because that's the way I was trained too, is totally on yourself and then the words are supposed to be like a mask, a thin mask but what I'm finding for me is what Laurie Laurie is going through is a whole lot of stuff that I haven't dealt with myself. And so there's a lot of personal stuff coming up but not that I'm putting it into it, its coming up."

Kath Gordon (PHEENIE) - "Yes well there is, I think there always is when you play any character its always reflects what's going on with you personally in your life and there is that stuff that does come into it and it can sort of linger there but you sort of do have to....."

Jade - "Well the character demands often that a muscle has to be flexed for the truth of that character, that you as a person might not have flexed. And so if you only go with what you think you know as a personal state, then you

will probably most likely block out the flexing of that muscle for the characters sake because it takes a lot of work in a way but if you hand over to a whole other force that uses that past your thinking, it'll force a change and it will force you to have to go through that personal change as a person so that you will have that colour in your toolbox for the next performance. "

Appendix B. Hedda Gabler & The Golden Age

Feedback from student actors participating in the first two productions to use these methods, *Hedda Gabler* by Ibsen in 1994 and *The Golden Age* by Louis Nowra 1996.

Student Feedback - The Golden Age (Louis Nowra) 1996

Jaqueline Cummins. (Assistant Director)

"In the early rehearsals of *The Golden Age* McCutcheon introduced journeying to the cast by way of cerebral meditation and awareness of one's body. As this process was completely new to me I chose to participate in these initial journeys. With cast members lying on the floor McCutcheon encouraged imagining oneself lying in a stream with the colours of the rainbow washing through the body, or lying beneath a tree beside the stream. She would then ask the cast to enter into the tree, walk down a flight of stairs and pass through a door into the world in which they would journey. This was a process which McCutcheon would take the cast in and out of every journey for the remainder of the rehearsal process. Once inside their world the cast were encouraged to move around in that world and meet with animals or beings with the intent of gaining knowledge about their character. As a participant in these early journeys I found it difficult to really 'let go' and experience a clear journey. This was probably due to the fact that I knew little about shamanism and was probably a bit sceptical. When interviewing members of the cast later, I found some opinions similar to mine.

Cast Feedback

"Initially I didn't want to be a part of it. I thought no, this isn't my style at all. I'd never even considered it (shamanic journeying) as a type of rehearsal technique. Guess I was quite close-minded about it."

"Chakras were very useful for actors with more than one role. In my role as George Ross for example, I established the dominant chakra as the Third Eye Chakra. For the character of James the dominant chakra was the root chakra. Concentrating on the dominant chakra for either character then provided the quickest doorway into that role; to switch roles I began by switching chakras. This can be likened to the use of character zeros in Commedia D'el Arte, where the actor can jump into role by firstly striking up the established physical pose the character assumes when motionless on stage." - Philip LLoyd (Dr. Ross, James, soldier).

"I am entering a wet, muddy land, it is a faraway place. I have never been here before. I am becoming the earth, it swallows me, in a huge sucking action, I am gone, underneath the soil - then I am spat out. Now I see my character, in the distance, she dances, she is covered in mud. All that is clearly visible is her vibrant orange hair. Her movement is wild and frenetic one minute and then soft and controlled the next. A deer nudges me and tells me it is time to leave now...."

"This is predominantly how I entered my character". - Claude Widtmann (Besheb).

"The shamanic journey allowed things to come to you about your character without strenuous thought. Rather than sit down and write a conscious character history, the journeys would subconsciously provide you with a whole library of images you could draw upon. It was a very natural and organic form of character creation." - Claude Widtmann, *The Golden Age* 1996.

"Interviews with the rest of the 'feral' group (the 'lost' tribe) revealed that four out of the six found the process a great way of discovering their characters. Most found it hard to let go in the initial journeys but this got easier with time. All said the chakra work helped to identify where emotions were coming from and where to focus this energy." - Claude Widtmann

Student Feedback - chakra work

"At first I couldn't even find my chakras but slowly I found my root and my heart. However, my throat and solar plexus felt closed." - Andy Turnbull in *Hedda Gabler* 1994.

"I was able to open my root chakra and join it to the centre of the earth with a cord of woven light. I saw the cord weave its way through the many colourful layers of the earth until it joined with a central whirlpool of light. Once joined I felt grounded." - Margie Collins in *Hedda Gabler* 1994.

"The Stanislavsky technique..greatly affected my initial approaches to creating the different characters....After taking into account the textual differences such as language and actions, I set about exploring the distinctions of both the physicality and psychology of each character....The use of chakras was particularly useful in this way, as I could concentrate on the dominant chakra for each character to make the change." - Phil Lloyd in *The Golden Age* 1996.

"Jade took us on a journey to open all seven chakras. As we began we were to 'white light' ourselves and let this flow out to encompass the entire room with everyone in it. Not the whole room, rather all of us. Like a brilliant milky seashore we were encapsulated. Beginning at the root, I clearly visualised the opening red chakra, spinning and growing. I personally found my lower three chakras harder to open and more physically dense, than the others. The second I could, however feel a small vibration. Whereas the fifth and seventh functioned excellently. My third eye is working very well at present, perhaps far too well for I feel it has a serious, repressing hold over my eccentricity. Realising this was wonderful, and reminding today was reassuring. After opening all seven and relishing in the steady humming and vibrations of my body, we closed each up individually as to protect. Closing them was like rewinding a drop in water. From the circular, spiralling splash to smooth surface. It was after this that I was to experience the most marvellous vibrations of my entire body. My body felt incredibly heavy and it was almost an effort and struggle to breathe. My face and throat

felt very different when I swallowed. Jade suggested we visualise laying on top of the dead sea where we just cannot sink. Well this was the most amazing experience of the day. I could physically feel the rippling of the waves under my back. I was not physically moving, but it was like the energy was kneading my whole posterior side. It felt like I was floating on waves.” - Tracy Burton in *Hedda Gabler* 1994.

Student Feedback on shamanic journeys experienced during *The Golden Age* rehearsal process in 1996

“As the rehearsal process continued I noticed the attitudes of the participants changed regarding these techniques. For myself the journeying became easier and although I had no character to focus my journey on, I experienced images of issues regarding my own life. The best way I can describe a journey is as a semi-conscious dream. Once the actors became used to the idea of journeying, they seemed to enjoy it. The actors began to find out interesting information about their characters by meeting with them in their journeys. McCutcheon succeeded in undertaking these shamanic exercises with the cast because she created a safe environment for the actors to explore how these techniques affected them individually.” - Assistant director, Jacqueline Cummings, *The Golden Age* 1996.

“(on the journeys)..that’s when I got a lot out of my character. I also learnt a lot from it personally, which I had to separate from what I was learning about my character, which was difficult. It was sort of opening up a whole

new part of my mind...I found it (journeying) really useful." - Claude Widtmann, actor (Betsheb) in *The Golden Age* 1996.

"All actors managed to decide on how they were going to use these techniques whether they believed in Shamanism or not. Most reported finding definite keys to their character through the use of Shamanic journeying." - Jacqueline Cummings *The Golden Age* 1996.

"During rehearsals the cast found the use of shamanic journeying to be one of the most effective ways of achieving insight into who their characters were. It was agreed that the experience of meeting or observing the characters as real people (during a 'journey'), not necessarily confined to the structure of the plays' narrative was an important one in creating the role. In preparing his role of 'Melorne', one actor told of his character taking him on hunting trips, and actually teaching the actor how he should portray 'Melorne' - the character directing the actor." - Jacqueline Cummings, *The Golden Age* 1996.

Shamanic journeys experienced by an actor during the *Hedda Gabler* rehearsal process in 1994

The following extracts of journeys experienced during shamanic meditations show many similarities to those experienced by shamans as pointed out in Chapter Two of this work. The most prevalent shamanic experience in the journeys experienced by the actors in all three productions using these methods is that of 'shamanic death'. This is a death of the self in another reality, often caused by an animal consuming the body. The actors are told of

this occurrence and the likelihood of this happening. We talked about it a great deal and came to the understanding that it was an empowering event of rebirth and not to be feared.

“I started my journey and suddenly was in the same tunnel (to a previous journey) but this time it seemed large. I could feel the stones under my feet. I walked slowly sensing movement in many directions. A wolf passed me but answered no question. Suddenly above me was an enormous bat that at first wrapped me up in its wings safely but suddenly I couldn't see the lights at the end of the tunnel. I began to struggle with the bat. I wanted to get away from it. I struggled but the more I struggled the worse it got, I thought I would die from lack of breath. The bat kept getting tighter and tighter. At last I gave up. I accepted that I would die. As soon as I did that the bat disappeared. I was free. I walked out feeling at peace. It was dusk at my magic place.* I looked around and saw a monkey who stared at me then pointed at a snake who was just about to strike. It bit me and as the poison went into my system I felt immense heat. It passed through me and I was myself again. Next to me swam a fish that showed me its family and invited me to join them. I felt that the fish was telling me ‘all is one, I am the same as you’. Above my head my eagle circled. As I left the pool it landed in front of me. I asked it if it had a message for me. It nodded and flapped its wings three times. It flew off. I looked behind and saw a very small cat. I asked it the same question. It nodded and for one instant looked like an enormous panther. It then drew with its paw five straight lines! I was then alone so I

came back to my body.” - Tracy Burton student actor/assistant director,
Hedda Gabler 1994.

Eagle journey - “...it (the eagle) wanted me to follow it, I did. I climbed up the cliff, it was hard and painful work. I wondered if I could fly but my body seemed too heavy and grounded. I reached the top of the cliff and still the eagle flew on. I followed, falling and tumbling down a rocky cliff. Then I was in a kind of rock desert that seemed to go forever and ever. I kept climbing, falling and hurting myself. I was nearly dead with thirst and exhaustion. I wondered if the eagle would stop. It was like it was my master and I was its slave. I had to follow it, I had no choice. Slowly I came to terms with the fact that the eagle would keep flying until I died. Yet I kept following it. I was owned body and soul by this eagle. I felt great fear, I knew that I would die if I kept following the eagle and I wondered if I would ever come back to physical reality. Somehow I doubted it. I had to stop following the eagle. Suddenly I could see a cord joining me to the eagle. It was joined from my waist to its tail. I tried with all my strength to break it I couldn't..... I must break it, I must free myself. I tried with all my strength to no avail. I was scared, angry then submissive by turns. I would fight with all my strength then fail and give up. At last I tried to cut it. I felt my time was running out...if I hadn't cut it by the time I was brought back to the physical I was in trouble. Somehow I knew this. In one final outburst of strength I sent a big lightning bolt through the cord and broke it. I was free. I had the strength after all. I turned away from the eagle and began to walk back to my

magic place, suddenly I felt something following. I turned to look, it was the eagle. As I looked at him I knew it had been a test and I had passed. I walked back to the mountain and the eagle let me know that I could fly if I could give up all fear. But I hadn't the strength left and I had to get back to the physical world so I climbed back to my body. Later...on, in another journey I flew. I have never ever had a dream about flying and now I have flown." -

Tracy Burton student actor/assistant director, *Hedda Gabler* 1994.

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