



The Lunatic Laboratory

The original July 2008 letter

A collaboration email: I would like to set up a seminar-workshop on "Moves and Movement" before next summer. Ideally a 5 day gathering. Below are my reflections on the subject, in the aftermath of the 2008 Scheherazade Festival, and in preparation for 2009 Philosophy 1. Check <http://www.pantheatre.com/gb/2-MT09-gb.html> - image-logo above.

I need a closer working collaboration with movement teachers / directors - in terms of choreographic theatre, and in a specific area to do with what I will call for the moment "The Lunatic Laboratory" - we can possibly find a better title.

"The Lunatic Laboratory" is an experimental training place which should be both methodical (even 'scientific') and 'loony'. Too much exposure to public light and the lunatic creatures withdraw, the fermentation ceases, the (de)composition dries out. Excessive privacy and promiscuity will sterilize the culture. A well graduated and well organized exposure is essential to provoke activity and attract inspirational 'bacteria'. The laboratory is also a place to test the passage from private to public: ACTS, the activation of activity, a training in catching fantasies and "acting out".

I need to re-establish and update a movement training procedure for choreographic theatre, based on the moves and movements of what we call a "leader", within the cornerstone training structure of choreographic theatre: the leader / follower exercise. Sometimes I've said : "improvise as if though you were a leader, but with no followers - activating the reflective fantasy of another "following you" - i.e. shadowing you, echoing you, doubling you, competing with you, overtaking you on your own terms, being your perfect twin, your heavenly reflection, your golden aura, or the sibling that wishes you evil, the traitor (the double-crosser), the enemy that knows more about you than you yourself, or your perfect Narcissistic other, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. (A list we should also work on, philosophically.)

Such training is a solitary business - especially when working within a group. It involves a culture of solitude (cultivating solitude, autonomy, a tragic sense of independence - and why not, 'analysis', of the kind that 'shrinks' sentimental binds.) All this, of course, within actual ensemble work and the glorious fabric of theatre and of the relationship to the spectators' gaze and ear, whomever these spectators may be - real onlookers, the balcony of fantasy watching mentors, the alchemical sisters or the contemplating enemies. It can be (and in a sense always is) ensemble-alone, with ghosts as companions. The theatre should always be crowded, the actor alone – another baroque paradox. (Nota: with the impending Haiti project, I am more than ever under voodoo influence !) Check <http://www.pantheatre.com/3-performances-haiti.html>

Back to praxis : my wish is to re-establish and update solo training and to foster a practice and a philosophy of moves and movements, a semiology of the kind I have sometimes called cryptic,

pseudo-linguistic; the moves and movements that draw and design the patterns from which Story can rise.

Two landmarks. First: Eugenio Barba and his long history of actor's movement training with his Odin Teatret – as inherited from Grotowski, methodized using the Etienne Decroux analytical techniques, as well as Commedia dell'Arte and many other traditions (re. his ISTA / theatre anthropology institute.) I think at one point (I might have mixed memories here, but it does not matter) Eugenio used the term "autogenic training" referring to the personal training of the actor, the daily confrontation with movement and imagination. Hours of group solitude, working your gestures alone in a group. This is obviously my selective interpretation. It was one of Pantheatre's early sources and we did spend hours and hours systematically working on this basis in the late 70s early 80s. The catalyser for me was Luis Ramirez, a Peruvian actor, a genius in this tradition.

The label "autogenic training" is in fact the trademark of "a relaxation technique developed by the German psychiatrist Johannes Schultz and first published in 1932." It is meditative auto-suggestion, basically. What I liked in the label was especially the "autogenic" element, i.e. autogenous: auto-generation, the auto-gestation of fantasy moves and movements, the link between gestation and gesture, the somatization in physical theatre. These references cover much of the training on the notion and practice of presence at Odin and like-minded theatres. It is often referred to as the "convincing presence" of the actor, linked to the charismatic quality of corporal presence and gesture. And it is fundamental training, especially the question of quality of conviction. I owe Eugenio Barba and Odin so much in their approach to physical imagination, to "acting out", even though in choreographic theatre, I tend to use the term "gesture" in a derived sense where quality is ultimately psychological, as in the expression: "to make a gesture" (or "to make a move".) Analysing this would take us too far into artistic territory, dramaturgy and 'image-wrighting'. Finally, autogenic means "self-generating". Here it should be understood as "generating self", or even: "generating selves". (Sonu Shamadasani would approve: "I claim the right to auto definition. I travel 'light': I have no self.")

This kind of "moves and movement" training take place in the laboratory: it is experimental labor, methodical fantasy, lunatic artisanship, invoking, provoking and organizing the "imps of improvisation." Very much in fact what I also call "The Lunatic Asylum" – the asylum, the refuge, the protected experimental laboratory, where participants cultivate meticulously their fantasy creatures before letting fly. "Cultivate" in both meanings: "education" and "fermentation". Education, that is: all the activities of the oratory – the Library: preparation, consultation, memory, inspiration, emulation, comparison, genealogy, etc... Fermentatio : one of Alchemy's most 'creative' operations.

The second landmark after autogenic training and Eugenio Barba, is C.G. Jung's concept of "active imagination". My main experience with this jungian practice is, like in many other areas, through James Hillman. In the jungian tradition, active imagination consist of dialogues with fantasy characters. Actual viva voce talking. Voicing, and "figuring out the voices". Jung had active imagination dialogues with a character called Philemon. "In 1913, Jung engaged in a lengthy period of self-investigation that he termed the "confrontation with the unconscious." As a form of psycholgoical self-experimentation, he decided to provoke fantasies in a waking state, and thereafter to attempt to interpret their significance and integrate their contents into conscisousness. He after called this method "active imagination" and made its use a part of clinical practice and analytic exploration. In retrospect, he stated that the material that emerged during this period, and his attempes to shape and comprehend it, formed the basis for the rest of his work." From https://www.philemonfoundation.org/index_flash.html.

The first time I heard Hillman elaborate on active imagination he included some powerful, dramatic scenarios and scripts of his own – a long way from the magisterial medieval romantic wisdom exchanges I imagined Jung having with Philemon – probably a mis-projection of mine (there are strong 'synchronicities' between Jung and Dada! Zurich, for one – same time, same place...) I realized that 'facing' imagination takes a lot of courage – and work; to actually

imagine, to activate images (active acting out) 'invoking' them from the undercurrents of creatures, behaviours, scenarios that lurk in our shadows, desires, caprices and moods. Active imagination indeed.

My proposal : a five days seminar on the "Lunatic Laboratory", concentrating on a methodology of "moves and movement" training for choreographic theatre.

Symbolically this is for Faroque Kahn as a teacher and director.

I wait for your responses.

Notes :

By including "moves" I want to keep the training neurotic, superstitious, spiritist, psychic, loony if you wish – and not to create another neo-mechanic system of movement – keeping in mind that "rules are made to confirm exceptions." Having said that, I want to work hard on method, on the "method in the madness".

On "contemplation" as "observing the temple" (and its patterns) - I think Dusan brought in "template" – great word in this context !

tem·plate also tem·plet

n.

1. A pattern or gauge, such as a thin metal plate with a cut pattern, used as a guide in making something accurately, as in woodworking or the carving of architectural profiles.
2. Computer Science
 - a. A document or file having a preset format, used as a starting point for a particular application so that the format does not have to be recreated each time it is used: a loan amortization template for a spreadsheet program.
 - b. An overlay that fits over all or part of a keyboard and has labels describing the functions of each key within a particular application.
3. A horizontal piece of stone or timber used to distribute weight or pressure, as over a door frame.
4. Biochemistry A molecule of a nucleic acid, such as DNA, that serves as a pattern for the synthesis of a macromolecule, as of RNA.

[Probably from French templet, diminutive of temple, temple of a loom.]

Best wishes

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