



The Lunatic Oratory

Port-au-Prince, Haïti, September 4, 2008

These notes are a follow-up of the original proposal: *The Lunatic Laboratory* (July 26, 2008.) Having proposed the *laboratory*, we must now set up the *oratory*.

The project now has a homepage: <http://www.pantheatre.com/gb/2-lunatic-project.html>.
The Lunatic Laboratory letter is on <http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/2-lunatic-laboratory.pdf>

A quote from my original proposal for *The Lunatic Laboratory* (July 26, 2008):

"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.**"

I guess I have to accept that the leader / follower exercise is "the cornerstone training structure of choreographic theatre"! I guess it has taken me this long to take it that seriously! Yes, it is an extraordinarily complex-simple exercise. I now want to set up a context of philosophical reflection on it: the "oratory" aspect of the "lunatic" project. This will no doubt provide the theoretical material for the July 2009 *Myth and Theatre Festival* - "Philosophy 1" – and beyond it, for "Philosophy 2" and more.

In my original letter I mentioned two of the main *praxis* references of choreographic theatre, namely: "autogenic training" as reviewed by Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret, and "active imagination" in the Jungian tradition.

Now let me introduce four topics of my current *teoria* research that link the "leader/follower" exercise with some of the most inspiring speculative thinking today. Ideally we should have oratory seminars on each one of these.

1. Recursive thinking, mirror neurones and "The Copycat Project"
2. Language *versus* Music, and "The Singing Neanderthals"
3. The artistic nature and quality of emotion
4. Alchemy: the Hillman / Giegerich debate. Hegelian sublation versus Hillman's mythopoetics.

Let me introduce these, one by one, with some initial reflections and leads you might want to follow-up.

1 - Recursive thinking, mirror neurones and "The Copycat Project".

- First, the amazing expression: "copycat"! I do not remember anyone making this connection with the leader/follower exercise. Hilarious – I am even thrilled by the fact that it is a cat! The usual expression is "monkey see, monkey do" – right? But hold on, this goes way beyond a photocopy brand!
- "The Copycat Project" was set up by Douglas R. Hofstadter, one of the most brilliant minds today in computer / linguistics / mind research. Consider this quote of his: "...even the most abstract and sophisticated mental acts deeply resemble perception." [210] You might guess my excitement given that one of my main philosophical proposals is: "imagination is perception"!
- [205] "Copycat is a computer program designed to discover insightful analogies, and to do so in a psychologically realistic way." The main article presenting Copycat (mid eighties) is on <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.18.3005>

Every page has amazingly thought-provoking formulations – even when these turn into mathematical formulae.

- What led me to Hofstadter was Noam Chomsky's famous statement that what differentiates human from animal communication, i.e. the "bottom line" of language and symbolic behaviour, is **recursion**, i.e. "recursive thinking". A definition: "Recursion, in mathematics and computer science, is a method of defining functions in which the function being defined is applied within its own definition. The term is also used more generally to describe a process of repeating objects in a self-similar way. For instance, when the surfaces of two mirrors are almost parallel with each other the nested images that occur are a form of recursion." (Wikipedia extract.) Recursive linguistic jokes were thought to be the ultimate 'move' by modernist conceptual artists (the post-Marcel Duchamp gang.) They thought they had decanted artistic creativity down to its last concepts and announced the end of art in the early seventies (or at least of representation.) This proved to be a delusional *cul de sac*, a referential blind alley which I am certainly not suggesting we take, clever as it can be - and still very much around in some of the "anti-dance" contemporary dance propositions. I am interested in Psyche's images and ways, which, surprisingly, I detect in Hofstadter – especially in his "tact and tone".
- Mirror neurones have been one of the most talked-about topics in neuro-psychology in recent years – especially for their role in learning and in movement training (and singing too.) Basically to do with the importance of kinaesthetic perception. It is very interesting to read scientific articles with the leader/follower exercise in mind, to study the terminology they chose - especially given that we say: "no mirroring." What we mean is something like "indirect mirroring", à la Perseus, who used a mirror to cut the Gorgo Medusa's head off, having been told that if he met her gaze (i.e. direct mirroring) it would petrify him, literally: turn him into stone. The "mirror" metaphor procedure is only one of many possible strategies in the leader/follower exercise. And there is always the possibility of "walking through the mirror"...
- Scientists today are engaging in very interesting archeo-sociological speculation on the necessity of chorus and choreographic "mirroring" – what I call "perfection" in the leader/follower exercise - reflecting the deep pleasure (and necessity) for 'perfect' group choreography.

2 - Language *versus* Music, and "The Singing Neanderthals"

- "The Singing Neanderthals / The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body" (some programme!), by Steven Mitchen. Harvard University Press, 2006. I admit I almost gave up on this book and plodded laboriously through the first part: some 100 pages of conservative clichés about music and language (I am being a bit harsh.) But then it got interesting when Mitchen entered paleoanthropology and speculations on the evolution of music and language - which came first? Which evolved out of which, and how? – topics that we have discussed at length as part of the Myth and Theatre Festival series on *Myths of the Voice*. Mitchen reports updated information on bipedalism and the evolution of the larynx position, on the false vocal chords, on the so-called usurpation of the voice by language, etc. His take on "singing" casts a very interesting light on Roy Hart's philosophy of the voice – it shares a certain 'enthusiasm' (which can almost sound like vitalism, or protestant spirituality...) always tempered by scientific caution.
- Mitchen also studies mirroring, mimesis, mimicry - and recursion: "Recursion, the embedding of one phrase within another, is likely to have become particularly important in order to induce and express emotions with maximum effect." [150] This is incredibly relevant to the 'advanced' configurations of the leader / follower exercise, when texts come into the picture, and to the working definitions we give emotion. Interestingly Mitchen never mentions rhetorics.
- Of particular relevance are also his carefully worded statements about voice and body engagement. These are amazingly similar to the principles and practice of the "vocal gesture" exercises I have been working with (mainly in regular "voice performance" classes in Paris): singing non-melodic scales of non-semantic phonetic syllabic sequences.
- I also roamed through Oliver Sacks' recent book: "Musicophilia – Tales of Music and the Brain". Unfortunately I could not survive on tales alone... and did not find the philosophical speculations I obviously need when confronting these issues – endearing and entertaining as Sacks can be.

3 - The artistic nature and quality of emotion

- I do not have 'presently definitive' references on this topic which has been of immense interest to me in the last years: I rarely find perspectives that in my view do justice to the subject, and this, in spite of the fact that "emotional intelligence" has been so much in fashion, or that emotion is so important to actors, and to expressive performing artists in general. The philosophies of emotion I came across are usually rudimentary and certainly not up to the role emotion plays in our lives and in art. As most of you know, I take a radical cultural and mythological view. My proposition is that we call emotions what in mythology are called angels – that is, messengers from the gods and goddesses, a Hillmanian, archetypalist point of view. Hillman wrote his doctoral thesis on emotion. It has been reprinted recently: it is an analytical inventory of the prevalent theories of emotion at the time (fifties, early sixties.) It is academic (a PhD thesis after all) but it does extract the philosophical foundations of each position, which is fascinating. Two years ago Linda and I went to a "cours magistral" at the prestigious Collège de France in Paris by the top Oxford professor on emotions, Edgar T. Rolls. His reductivist pragmatism was astonishing, backed up by all the latest images of blood flow mappings of the brain. He defied anyone to give a definition of emotion other than as biological punishment and reward mechanism.
- Like many of us I am listening carefully to Antonio Damasio and fellow scientists on emotion, but I have still to find philosophical speculations that measure up to the artistic importance of emotion.

4 - Alchemy: the Hillman / Giegerich debate. Hegelian sublation *versus* Hillman's mythopoetics.

- This debate has been going on for some years now in the relatively small world of post-Jungian archetypal psychology. Wolfgang Giegerich is a German psychotherapist who has challenged James Hillman's philosophy of image from a dialectical, Hegelian point of view. One interesting aspect of his argumentation, maybe the one that perplexes me the most, is his use of alchemical references. In fact the debate sometimes feels like a philosophical joust in the appropriation of alchemy – who has the last word on what alchemy is (was / should be / etc.) ultimately about. This 'last-word' mechanism can be a fastidious pattern in archetypal psychology discussions – for instance the way Hillman's followers sometimes argue: "I can see through your seeing through of my seeing through, etc..." The Hillman / Giegerich debate has nevertheless fascinating implications.
- The presentation I make of the Lunatic Laboratory Project is full of alchemical references, and I have developed a take on alchemy that very much suits my theatrical work. For instance, I am giving a lecture here in Haiti on "Alchemical Salt and the Axis of Bitterness". It is about the performance we are producing, and about Haiti. (It is now on the PANTHEATRE website.)
- In item 1, above, I make a stand for the importance and complexity of the leader/follower exercise; I want now to do something similar with my take on alchemy, and for the importance of choreographic theatre. There is no question that I would not have turned to alchemy had it not been for the way in which C.J. Jung 'rediscovered' it. There is also no doubt that the main model in my approach to alchemy is inspired by the *corpus* of articles on alchemy by James Hillman – which I consider to be some of his best mytho-poetic writing. Alchemy for Jung, Hillman and Giegerich is linked to depth psychology, to the quest and operations proposed by psychoanalysis – and to the *augmentatio* of consciousness – certainly for Giegerich. Where is theatre in all this? Where are the performing arts?
- Spring Journal (no longer run by Hillman, nor by Charles Boer and Jay Livernois – but very much linked to the Pacifica Institute in California) dedicated its Issue 74 (Spring 2006) to *Alchemy*, with an opening article by Stanton Marlan which includes his analysis of the Hillman / Giegerich debate. Stanton Marlan sees the debate going all the way to ultimate foundational choices: poetry versus philosophy, the 'progress' of consciousness, philosophy as a preparation or reconciliation with death, etc. At this level, alchemical metaphores get very 'crazy' in their ambition and poetics, obviously – arcane, impossible, provocative, contradictory, seductive, desperate, mystical, etc. – but still worth following, for those who want to take the plunge (see also the note below on the critique by Shiela Grimaldi Craig.) Marlan's article is followed by an article by Giegerich with a very relevant (to us, in any case) critique of the link Jung originally made between psychoanalysis and alchemy.
 - You can visit <http://www.springjournalandbooks.com> for the 2006 *Alchemy* issue of Spring Journal.

- I will scan and make these articles available for consultation through <http://www.pantheatre.com/2-lunatic-project.html> (on return to France)
 - Shiela Grimaldi Craig wrote a critique of Giegerich's first book "The Soul's Logical Life" (which followed Hillman's bestseller: "The Soul's Code" – already a debate through titles!) and in which she describes Giegerich's philosophical Hegelian construction as a Kafka-cum-Escher paranoid surrealistic edifice. This highly spiced critique appeared in an earlier issue of Spring Journal, edited by Charles Boer and Jay Livernois. I will also make this available for consultation.
- Let me now bring this debate to bear on choreographic theatre (it also concerns voice work – especially the questions raised by "The Singing Neanderthals" - but this would require too big a detour to include here.) The premise of my work is what Hillman calls "the poetic basis of mind". His thinking presides (he is our honorary president) and is the main inspiration of my work. A clear example would be the way in which I define the core training of choreographic theatre: to develop "the instinct of image". When Giegerich charges Hillman and his followers with being "*enthralled by sensory intuition*" I feel we are first in line for this attack, although Giegerich seems not to address art but to address exclusively meta-psychology. What is the position and role of the artist in this debate? I insist that choreographic theatre training addresses the performer first and foremost as artist, and by that I mean as image-thinker-enacter, as physical-image-philosopher, especially given the importance we have given in recent years to notions such as "figuring out" or "realizing": "how to realize thinking?" – "how to figure out ideas?", crucial operations in the theatre / alchemical laboratory.
 - Nota: The quote of Giegerich ("*enthralled by sensory intuition*") was sent to me by Marie Elliot-Gartner who attended a conference in honour of James Hillman in Pittsburgh, June 2008. Marie is an actress and a PhD graduate from the Pacifica Institute. She produced and acted in "Rosenhell und Bildersturm", a performance based on Hillman's book "The Dream and the Underworld" which I directed in Bavaria in 1997. Marie is putting together a DVD of the performance - see <http://www.mythotheatrics.com>.

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Port-au-Prince, Haïti, September 4, 2008