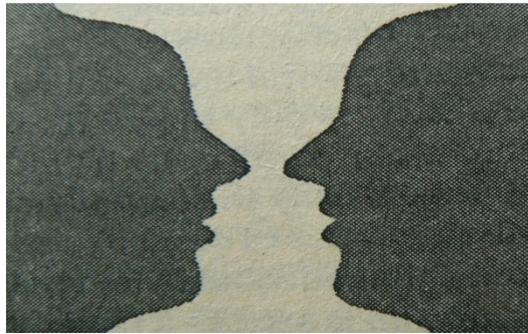


## I-I

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Paul Maunder



‘The being becomes human when it invents theatre.’

Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire*, p14.

E te whare, Rex Cramphorne, e tu nei, tena koe. E nga mate, haere ki tua e te arae,  
haere ke te po, haere ki te po. E te hunga ora, tena tatou katoa.

I greet the house and the ancestors for this paper is at best, genealogical, at worst foolishly personal, so that I may appear a little like Polonius, an old man ranting. When I saw the call for papers for this conference in Sydney, on the theme of the Player's Passion, I drafted a hasty and intuitive proposal. When I came to write the paper I realised that the proposal was resonating on a number of levels, first of all that of nostalgia.

Fifty years ago, I arrived in Sydney, a naïve, working class Kiwi, to attend the directing course at NIDA and to formally begin a career in theatre. There were only six of us on the course which turned out to be more of a stage management course, and if feeling cynical, useful in providing a cheap stage crew for Old Tote productions.

Rex Cramphorne was a fellow student and halfway through the year we decided we had come to NIDA to learn how to be directors and so we devised and directed a play together for the Drama Society, my first experience of initiating content.

Philip Parsons came to a performance and afterward took us for a drink and said, 'Look, don't enter theatre from the bottom. By the time you get to directing you'll have had your soul destroyed. Enter sideways.'

Rex and I were suspended from NIDA for a couple of weeks, because what we'd done was improper in terms of course protocol, but we then received some directing opportunities. So it is resonant to speak in this room named in Rex's honour.

That same year I met Denise Young, who I am staying with on this trip and who accompanied me in early theatre ventures. That is the first level of resonance, that of returning to the beginning of a lifetime's passion.

And then, as I pondered the theme of the conference, I realised that what I was trying to get at in my proposal, was that while accepting the basic proposition that acting theory and methodology centres on the relationship between interiority and the expression of that interiority in gesture and voice, and that while accepting that wider belief systems impact on that relationship, my personal journey as a theatre worker questions the simplicity of the paradigm: that there is a whole thing called a person, with a whole thing called interiority which finds expression in a whole thing called performance. And that questioning could in turn question the supposedly whole and objective voice of the academic.

Let me explain.



I was born to a woman whose interiority, for a variety of reasons, was disintegrating. That first intense relationship with the world, which gives sustenance on every level to a baby, was traumatic and riven with loss.

When I was subsequently adopted by a less interesting but more stable family, I suppressed that early relationship, and as we know can happen, acted the part of child, not consciously, but as a survival technique.



As R.D. Laing explains: Identity and autonomy are in question, as is the experience of temporal continuity. Self is partially divorced from the body.

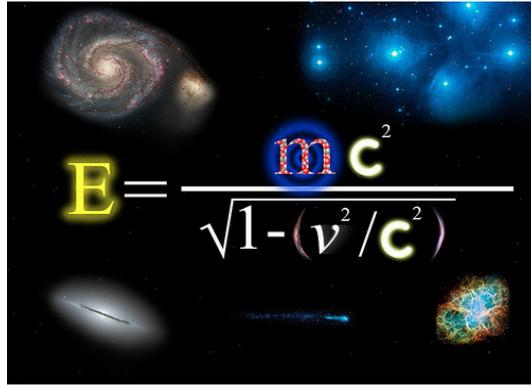
Such schizoid kids are often very good, focus on pleasing adults and are obsessed by the patterning of things.



I became fascinated by maths and science and the highly technical game of cricket.



Einstein's theory of relativity interested me, the idea that there is no stable observer or thing being observed. Light bends, mass changes into energy. In theory you can travel fast enough to see yourself arriving.



But there is one constant: the speed of light in a vacuum.

But such an adaptive act, as Laing points out, is fragile and narrow. And of course, the hormonal surges of adolescence and the forming of intense emotional relationships with the opposite sex begin to shake the structure. Such stresses can lead to schizophrenia. Instead I discovered theatre and I say discovered because I didn't live in a household where the arts existed, and the household was framed by a 1950s provincial town intent on rugby, racing and beer, with a nod once a week to God.

Nevertheless, I pursued an arts degree and acquired a growing passion for theatre, which led me to Sydney.

Theatre revealed that the act that I was already living could become visible, could be rehearsed, changed, improved upon, and as I chose this career path, Stanislavski was the first master I encountered.

He was the first to break with the codified teaching of gesture and voice that still existed in the English world, the first to create, in his words, 'a practical textbook'. When he wrote: 'I know that all around me on the stage is a rough counterfeit of reality. It is false. But if all should be real, I might be carried away to some such scene. Then I would act.' And that the task of the actor is to 'extract from the recesses of his working memory the combinations of emotions necessary to the part,' he described a personal need.



By playing another, self is explored, expanded, aligned.

Emotional memory is a difficult concept to put into practice, but occasionally coherence forms, and the actor is telling a version or a portion of his own life while playing a part quite removed. The journey had begun.

Imagination, the I-I, became then, that constant speed of light in the vacuum.

Nevertheless, this remained mainstream theatre, unquestioning of the exteriority of theatre, in the sense of its place in society which had experienced, or was experiencing, world wars, death camps, Hiroshima, globalisation... and unquestioning of theatre's response to the changes of technology which were impacting. It provided one motion, one trajectory, relative to other trajectories.

Enter Grotowski, disciple of Stanislavski (and it was wise in the old Eastern Europe to pay homage to Stanislavski for political reasons). Grotowski took to extremes the two poles of the interiority/external performance relationship. Research involved 'the idea of a penetration into human nature itself.' 'By casting off his everyday mask, the actor makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration.' The actor \* 'must be able to construct his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a poet creates his own language of words.' This task attracted me on a personal level, for it could enable me to deal with that initial trauma which had taken place pre-verbally.

The training began with the external, but it was an exteriority that suggested essential patterns and gestures generated by man, before the Tower of Babel, the market of cultures. I could see behind my back, see past the melancholic mother to something archetypical. It could be problematic as an idea, even suggestive of fascism, but there were moments in training which were highly integrative, finding a genetic memory, for instance, of the paleolithic, which provided an experience of absolute wholeness, The divided self reassembled into a new trajectory, a new relativity.



And the aesthetic model – to confront previous myths of collectivism , 'the representations collective' of a society with the cynicism of modern individualism - was of great interest to a colonial. Does the settler, intent on individual gain, have any collective stories or collective representations? We hunted around. Breaking in the land? Too individualistic.



Ah- Gallipoli as a formation of nationhood (currently resurrected into a banal, sentimental burst of nationalism which has had me retching); but if confronted by that cynicism, some truth could be told. And the searching, slowly but surely, dissolved that settler culture and set me on a new path.

But after providing a new foundation, Grotowski passes over into a monastic training, taking place in a retreat, a place in which to align the confused identity of many in a globalised world. And I am speaking of, for instance, the creation of an ethnodrama and a song of self, among other facets of his para-theatrical work. It involves a reassembling of interiority and finding a disciplined role for that interiority, rather than playing for the consumer and being part of the spectacle.



There was one relationship left to investigate: the Brechtian/Boalian task – to create, through play, the external figure and circumstances of ‘the new man and woman’, the words and actions of the citizens of a just society. A new Player's Passion. In Boal's words:

‘Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself, when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see itself – see itself *in situ*: see itself seeing. Observing itself, the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not and imagines what it could become... It allows him to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives.’

What training of interiority is required? What impulses? What imaginings? Once again, in Boal's words:

...physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions.

These techniques often involve a clearing out, a cleansing of the results of oppression at a personal level, by, for example, exploring ritual gestures that signify everyday oppressions.



The theatre worker becomes a facilitator of social change, and such an activist has to be active with and within a body of people. So I was led to community-based theatre and back to the beginning of the story, back to family, but with this difference, being able to help change that family situation. What if a different society had existed when I was born? If there had been support systems in place, a benefit for single parents, free child care... This journey would have been different, perhaps not made.

This paradigm has of course, been the framework for the struggles of identity politics and the resulting achievements: homosexual law reform, equal pay and opportunities, workplace rights, gay marriage, human rights more generally...

But lately, as community has in turn been colonised by the Empire, which wishes to possess everything, and as, in the developed world at least, the post modern creating of difference has become routine and part of the system, the experience of rupture, of division, is being seen as a liberating impulse.

To effectively confront the basic antagonism of late capitalism, the 99% versus the 1%, we have to move past the aggregations of diversity, and to accept that, in the words of Jodi Dean, 'we are internally divided, not fully conscious of the desires and drives that motivate us.' We are forced 'to confront the lack that the system generates, with our own lack' and 'division must be inscribed and asserted as antagonism.' Only then will we be able to build a truly collective response.

This involves as well, confronting the lack that the digital world produces.

For example, when working with young actors, I find that they have great skill, but I get a sense that the skill comes from having been immersed in performance from an early age. They have downloaded every possible gesture and vocalisation for every possible situation. While they live in a supposedly highly subjective world, as artists they operate in the old one of prescribed gesture and vocal intonation. So the magic of the I-I is not there. They are adapted children, need to discover division, need to discover the real, to discover the Player's Passion.



So, I am back at the beginning, looking behind myself, seeing myself arrive.

Kia whakarongo ake

Ki te tangi e te manu

E rere runga awa e

Tui tui tui tui a

Tui a i runga

Tui a i roto

Tui a i raro

Tui a i waho

Tui tui tui a

Ka rongo te po

Ka rongo te au

Tui tui tui a...

Kia ora

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