

Embodied performer

The initial 'hook' for these words was my intention to write about a workshop I led at a Performance Studies International Conference in Wales. Once started on that project I realised that none of it would make much sense without the context of my work as a whole. So I decided to expand the scope of the writing and attempt to describe my work with performers. I use the word attempt because the writing and the practice are not linked in any straightforward manner. The scope of the writing project has grown again. I am attempting to find a relationship between (my) writing and (my) practice.

There are no 'ideological' objections on my part. My project here is to write (up) (down) (about) my practical work. I want to. Partly because I am often asked if any writing exists, and partly because I want to let people know what I have discovered, what I have done in a way that can be accessed when I am not there. In other words to reach an audience (a readership) that goes beyond those whom I have encountered personally (like you reading this now).

In my practical theatre work the need to make contact is at the heart of the enterprise. Is contact possible via writing ? I am writing this in order to make contact, not to theorise my own work. I develop my practical work in the absence of theory as separate. Though I am well aware that theorists would have a field day objecting to that statement. No doubt a theoretical position underpins what I am writing at this very moment, but I am not aware of it, or I choose to ignore it. So there is no theoretical starting point, no hypothesis which can be used as a reference point for the writing. But there is a starting point, there is always a starting point. Starting is a matter of will, of decision, and it is possible to describe the conditions in which decisions take place. These are not causal conditions, but they are existing, circumstantial conditions. In my case I can describe the starting point for my current practice as a desire to make performance differently, very differently. The details of 'different' from what, or from when, are not important, it is the fact of 'difference' that is critical. My need to find a new (for me) way of working in order

to be able to keep working. It is a matter of (my) creative life or death. So there are no clear cut objectives here which can be written. My creative practice has no objectives, or aims, other than to happen at all. What this means for the project of writing (about) my work is that there is no convenient theory to use as a hook (an excuse) for the words. To theorise (and I have done so on many occasions) is to write (about) something else, something (thoughts, ideas, reflections etc) that happens in addition to the practice.

The project for (my) writing is to remain in the present tense, to write (about) what happens rather than what happened. The observer and the observed event validate the writing of 'what happened'. The same holds for the writing of what is happening, and is the very essence of the news event, telling it 'as it happens'. Writing 'what happens' goes to the heart of my project because the technique I want to write is not dependent on events, it is an embodied practice that is constantly present in the human beings who have embodied (learned) it, it is always there.

The technique itself is a way of doing. It is a way of developing and understanding action. It is a way of undertaking action responsively (responsibly) with others. It is also a technique (in my case) that is sufficient to bring about performance. It does not need something else to work on. Neither is it 'pre-expressive'. There is no 'pre' because there is no-thing to come after. The technique I am writing (about) is never other than an expressive technique.

Similarly my embodied practice is not added on to the physical practice of a performer. It is not a set of skills, though it is skilled practice. What is embodied is already there, but needs to be 'brought to the front' so that the performer is able to use it.

This is the case with the **basic positioning system of the human**. We have a sense of in front, behind, above, below and directly to the left and to the right. Without it we would not know where are. Yet we do not access this function, 'bring it to the front' in our everyday lives. It just underpins everything else we do. In order to be able to begin work my performer must be aware of their positioning system, and be able to access it directly.

Stand with feet slightly apart. Be balanced evenly. Let the weight of the body centre downwards, towards the pelvis. Relax your stomach. Breathe evenly, not too deeply but not in shallow breaths either. Align the shoulders, and the head. Gaze out from this position directly ahead of you, letting your eyes encounter whatever is there, or comes into your vision as you stand there. Listen to whatever your ears can hear without picking anything out for particular attention.

Once this is 'brought to the front' in this way it does not go away. It is not something new, rather something forgotten in performing. The technique is cumulative. One thing builds on another, with everything remaining in place throughout. It cannot be broken up into constituent bits, once embodied it is always there.

In the Psi workshop we were working on a football pitch with an artificial surface (we later moved into an indoor studio, but it was locked initially). I drew a line in the dust of the pitch directly to the right and to the left of each foot of a participant, starting from the centre of the foot and working outwards. I called this line a 'time-line' and said it represented the boundary between the past (behind you) and the future (in front of you). Once aware of the positioning ability the next step is the first step(s). Maintaining the look, the listening and the positioning awareness take a few steps into the future space that lies directly before you. When you come to a stop there is a new time-line, but you have carried this with you with every step. It is always there. You cannot leave it behind you, you are always on the threshold of past and future. But don't look back, always face forwards and always move forward. The technique abolishes the past by (con)fronting the future space at every moment and every where. There is no going back, only a going into. No holding on, only a letting go. You are constantly in between the state of something and no-thing, full and empty, 1 (everything there is) and 0 (emptiness, ready for something). I can write it like this: 1001100. This is digital performing. Once you have started to move forward the steps can be dispensed with. Move forward or rest. Two more options that operate in digital code. You have this decision as a constant. There is no outside agency that is going to intervene and take over your process. You are the

embodied agent. Once moving forward keep the line direct. Don't waver, or bend, or get out of the way. Light only moves in a straight line. You are light. Only an obstacle, an impenetrable obstacle can stop you moving in a straight line, if you want, all round the earth (which turns the line into a circle). At an obstacle stop. At this point in the Psi workshop the participants moved off like bits in an expanding universe, some finding the fence no obstacle and moving onwards into woods that lay beyond the pitch, others finding the fence to be an obstacle and stopping, others again finding another participant who hadn't moved at all who was then an 'obstacle' to further movement forwards. There is no end to this forward movement given in advance. You can continue for as long as you can, or for as long as you want to. Stopping is always an option.

You can turn. You can turn when you meet an obstacle, or you can turn anyway, at any time. Turning is revolutionary. Turning 180 turns the world the other way round. You are facing a completely different way. By turning you keep yourself in a particular place, you are not wandering the world. Turning is fundamental. If you turn 360 you are facing the same way, turn 360 again and again and faster and faster and you are spinning. Spin long enough and you will be still and the world will be spinning round you.

We can work in lines and in circles. This is a line: 1. This is a circle: 0. We are back to digital code. Are numbers my 'theory'? I think they are. Three performers together is 111. If one of these performers is not there we have 101, the zero representing the absent performer who is no longer there, but who might return. The performer is the one who creates the zero, who brings no-thing into being. But the absent performer is not absent to himself. Wherever he is, he is present, he is 1. The difference between absence and presence, there and not there, is really the difference between you and me. I cannot make myself a zero, I cannot not be here. So the creation of no-thing, of absence, arises from the performer being present, and knowing that they are present. And what about 1 1 1 ? The co-existence of more than one. This is the condition that most interests people. It is the realisation, the experience that I am not alone. It is essential that the 1 exists for this to happen. In the technique I have developed a lot of work goes into creating 1, the taking of individual responsibility, the acknowledgement of your own power to make decisions

and to take the consequences of decisions. Independence from others is critical. It is the opposite of the ensemble, of the abandonment of the individual for the group. In this work the dynamics rest on competition and collaboration. I can compete, I can collaborate. When I compete I strive to overcome, to resist, to retain what I am doing in the face of the other. When I collaborate I go with, I assist. These are the fundamentals of independent dynamics. Neither imply any kind of control. Most practitioners, when faced with the open-ness of this technique, try to control themselves, and others. Control, the buzz word of much acting technique, is not possible in this practice. When 1 and 1 becomes 11 then we are faced with the reality of 2. The co-existence of more than one. The difference between 1 and the other 1. When the rare moment of synchronicity occurs, 1 and 1 initiating an action simultaneously (turning, coming to a stop, starting to move forward and so on) there is intense resonance because of the merging, at that precise moment of two separate entities. 1 and 1 becomes something else, not 1 but no longer separate, a totally new, weird and impermanent phenomenon. And one that is not under the control of the performers who have initiated it in any way. This leads to a particular state of trying to stay with, knowing that the slightest change in conditions can make it disappear, but also knowing that it will disappear anyway at some point. This effort of sustaining is very different from the effort of breaking up, or destroying, and much harder to do. It is very different from the agonistic concept of tension, or conflict. It is the acceptance of change, and that change is constant. It is knowing how to work with the fluid rather than the fixed, with the unpredicted rather than the planned. Knowing what is certain, so that you can accept uncertainty full on. I have no idea what any of this means in a completed sense. This writing is not a conclusive explanation of my performer practice. It is writing in response to my experience of that embodied practice and the events consequent upon putting that way of embodiment into action.

Each one of us is an experiencing organism. This technique does not attempt to re-present experience in any way. It does not put the experience of the performer (or anyone else) 'on hold' for the duration of the performance, or the technical work. It does not attempt to control experience in any way (the warning on control applies everywhere). The performer has no-thing to give the spectator, certainly not their own 'experience'. There is

no past in this technique. There is only the present and the future. Is the consciousness of an 'experience' an indication that it is already in the past ?. Can we make contact with the moment of experience itself? The moment of action that is not the experience of that action but the doing of that action ? The words are straining to keep up with what is being written. In the practice, words are never used in this area. It is beyond words, not silent, but not capable of being translated into the symbolic utterance of writing. But in writing this I can hope that the reader is nevertheless there, in that place where the doing is about to happen, and where everything is potential. Or in the endless possibility of doing without pause, action that does not drag a future experience of its resolution into its present, but which has intense pleasure while and for as long as it lasts.

The most difficult thing for a performer to come to terms with in this work is the fact that they have no-thing to give to the spectator. The technique does not fill up the performer with some-thing which is then emptied out in the course of the performance to be re-consumed by the spectator. The performer is empty to begin with. This is controversial in theory. I have been told on numerous occasions that we are 'full' of our cultural history, our sexual history, our racial history, our social status, our psychological history and so on. But this is a theoretical position only. In practice I can put this to one side. I can choose to work differently. Decisions made in practice are not subject to any constraint imposed by theory. So if practice is free from theoretical constraint, does it have any constraint on it at all ? In the development of my work this has become a critical question. I have decided to work only with those constraints that are unavoidable, and not to impose any other constraints on the possibilities for performer action. The implications of this decision are far reaching. It works like this. To work in such a way that any constraints are unavoidable and not imposed by me means working without any constraints whatever as a goal for practice. If any constraints are discovered it follows they are necessary rather than imposed. No constraints are therefore accepted at any stage. It is always a matter of going beyond the constraint, of moving on from the cant be done to the lets do it These words make it sound like a physical thing, of skill and endurance, but in reality the constraints are not always physical (though these clearly exist). Constraints can come from the performer saying there is a constraint and accepting

that it is so. It is not a matter of agreement, 'let's say there is no constraint and agree to get on with it', or of ignoring. There has to be an acceptance by the performer of total possibility, which in turn leads to total openness to possibility, within a conscious decision making which can say I want to do this.

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