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Title: THE THEATRE OF THE BODY.

My interest in masculinity – an issue of personal and cultural embodiment - arises from my own experience and my reflections upon that experience. In this respect, I don't pretend to be a detached observer. I am, as Heinz von Foerster (von Foerster & Poerksen, 2002) would say, a crucial element in the observation. It is not simply my observations that are of interest here. To them must be added the second order exercise: my observation of my observation, my reflective consciousness. 'I' am essential within this knowing and I am vulnerable to its consequences. Within my reflective consciousness lies the ethical, value system that identifies and appreciates my knowing. Within this also lies opportunities for the crafting of creative expression.

Commencing this discussion I assert that my embodiment – which incorporates my feeling response to the world - is part of how I know the world. It is crucial to my experience as an instinctive actor and reflective theorist. If knowing is arrived at through embodied consciousness, my ontology – my way of being – is intimately related to if not determined by my epistemology – my way of knowing - and vice versa. This is reinforced by findings in cognitive science, as reported by linguists Lackoff & Johnson (1980, 1999). They argue that “human reason is a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and the peculiarities of our brains” and “our bodies, brains and interactions provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real.” (1999: 17). This is an especially relevant in discussions around the dramatic encounter. As Joseph Roach (1985) says, “the immediate presence of the body to itself” is among the most startling discoveries of young performers (16). Accordingly, ‘what does it feel like?’ is one of the questions most frequently asked in drama.

It's a curious recognition, this. While it may long have been the basis of working practices in the arts it is not something anyone can feel altogether comfortable bringing to an academic setting, primarily because, the academic world is not especially comfortable with this sort of vulnerability. Admissions of 'the personal body' stand in contrast to the time honoured valuing of detached rationality. And while such disquiet may be no more than symptoms of a modernist hangover it continues to generate conflict. A variety of people have written of this. Recently Terry Eagleton (2003) has written on the difference between post modernism's theorising of the body and subjective accounts of embodied experience. I am drawn particularly to the work of feminists like educationalist Patti Lather (1991), sociologists Susan Krieger (1991) and Laurel Richardson (1997) and anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996). In particular I recall Behar's statement in her book *The Vulnerable Observer*. "Anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (177).

As said, the creative arts – and popular culture – are more comfortable, or less uncomfortable, with personal vulnerability. Creative works are often constructed through research that employs and explores, even exploits embodiment and emotion. And yet many artists still feel the need to justify or explain this. In his highly self-referential novels, Dave Eggers (2000) does exactly that.¹

I was born into a town and a family and the town and my family happened to me. I own none of it. It's everyone's. It is shareware. I like it, I like having been a part of it, I would kill or die to protect those who are part of it, but I do not claim exclusivity. Have it. Take it from me. Do with it what you will. Make it useful. This is like making electricity from dirt; it is almost too good to be believed, that we can make beauty from this stuff. (Eggers, 2000: 188)

The eloquence of Egger's defence suggests the power of his revelations and the social forces that stand in judgement upon such expression (thus requiring such eloquence). Inherent in this is a suggestion that emotional vulnerability is more

than a condition; it is a reservoir of insight, understanding and knowledge and available for use.

Antonio Damasio (2003) makes very clear distinctions between emotion and feeling. The former he locates in the body, the latter he identifies as a socially constructed response to the embodied experience. “Emotions play out in the theatre of the body. Feelings play out in the theatre of the mind” (28) he says. This play of emotion is a domain within which we interact every day. Such interaction has been described as conditional upon the capacity to improvise. Accordingly Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990) argues that, “the most common form of improvisation is everyday speech... ”.

As we talk and listen, we are drawing on a set of building blocks (vocabulary) and rules for combining them (grammar). These have been given to us by our culture. But the sentences we make with them may never have been said before and may never be said again. Every conversation is a form of jazz. The activity of instantaneous creation is as ordinary to us as breathing. (Nachmanovitch 17)

Formally, the field of emotion and feeling is that within which we play in the arts. While it is available, as Nachmanovitch says, to all of us, it is the particular responsibility of arts workers and arts educators to inquire into and become familiar with the dynamics of this ‘play’ (whilst remaining naïve, in many ways, to the variety of its manifestations).

Drama, theatre and performance draw on embodied experience. It is central to actor training and to the relationship between performers and audience. The embodied feeling response prior to emotional consciousness is pivotal. The visceral bursts of excitement – the ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’ - that occur during, for example, the opening ceremony of an Olympic Games are only identified as ‘feeling’ after the event. It is ‘emotion’ that artistic directors seek to bring about; likewise, the staged political forum, the tremulous build up to the first performance of a new play and the sombre ceremonial remembrances of Anzac

Day. All are structured to bring the body to a form of knowing. The 'shiver up the spine', the 'weakness at the knees', the 'lump in the throat', the 'tear in the eye', the 'swelling in the heart', the 'stirring in the loins', the 'wrinkling of the brow' no less so.

Because culture is, at least initially, a field of emotion, and drama, theatre and performance methodologies for the generation of feeling, the feeling, the personal embodied experience of gender, is also an issue. Whether it is as subject matter or problem or simply presence, gender is inescapable. In this respect it is worth pointing out that men dominate the business of film, television and theatrical production. In addition the principal roles in film, television and theatre are predominantly male, but the majority of students who enrol in and graduate from education programs in Acting are female.ⁱⁱ Between 1990 and 2003 the University of Western Sydney (UWS) graduated 267 students from its Acting program. Of the 267, 168 were female and 99 male. If tertiary training is solely a form of vocational training one might assume that these female students are poorly informed, idealists or fantasists. If tertiary training is about following up an instinctive, or even a considered, response to a form of specialised knowledge it would seem other factors may be at work. It is here that I want to introduce the issue of emotion and vulnerability to feeling and suggest that perhaps there is a greater preparedness - or even a greater desire - among young women than young men to encounter the vulnerabilities that arise in and through the study of performance.

In a paper of this kind a researcher could set about testing the proposition that 'vulnerability' has a relationship to enrolment patterns. It is not exactly what I want to do here. Instead I want to work with the assumption that this relationship exists, then query the experience of vulnerability and the intimidation contained therein.

Masculinity is largely known through assumptions, constructions and accounts. These have their origins in personal reports of personal encounters. It is also known through difficulties in interpreting and communicating such encounters. Jonathan Rutherford (1992) discusses this at length as he argues the lack of a male 'language of feeling'. Consequences of this include, Rutherford says, incoherence and silence. He discusses these silences through reference to Raymond Williams 'structure of feelings': a system Williams devised to discuss "what is not fully articulated, all that comes through as disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble", which precedes practical expression and knowing". (11) That such feelings do not find their way into verbal exchange does not mean however that they are not encountered or communicated.

A central lesson of drama is that body language overrules verbal language. This has been a tenet of actor training since Stanislavsky. Moreover, acting is taught through a craft tradition. Oral and embodied discourses are vital to its communication. In such teaching, silence, like absence, is a dramatic tool. In the theatre it is experimented with constantly. Augusto Boal (1992) argues that a direct consequence of this is that actors are very conscious they are using embodied languages, "and are thus better able to turn ... (them) to their advantage." (xxx) Yet, in terms of seeking training to facilitate such understanding – for such training is not widespread beyond performance (and associated growth and therapeutic trainings) – evidence suggests that men recognise and value this less than women. It is arguable that this is more than an issue of vulnerability. It is also an issue of awareness and skill development. But vulnerability cannot be set aside. In theatre there is an essential relationship between vulnerability and dramatic truth and vulnerability and skill in performance. Arriving at such vulnerability is the process that challenges drama students most. First there must be a need to realise, then there needs be a strategy for its accomplishment.

While process is central to all creative practices drama is undertaken in relationship in a way that the others – with the some time exception of music - are not. Drama ensembles are powerful vehicles for the interpretation of experience. The collective consciousness of those involved is a mass of methodology and learning. It's learning is different to the learning involved in solo work. There is firstly, the chance to talk about it and secondly, the collective (embodied) consciousness that arises in and remains after the event. Drama is, in this regard a refined form of collective inquiry as much as it is a means for the delivery of product. The process is not a means to a predefined goal but it is one that can be identified and appreciated, which has collective and individual aspects, and which can be worked with systematically and strategically. But first it is necessary to discuss the need to know, for in this need lies much of the challenge of adult masculinity. When symbolic ritual is no longer used to mark life's transitions, change is confronted differently.

There is considerable literature on the personal transitions of men. Much of this is transition through suffering: for example melancholia (Smith 1999), paralysis (Kriegel 1998) and cancer (Franks 1995). In *The wounded storyteller* Arthur Franks writes of the importance of story in such transitions. In doing so he writes of the relationship between suffering, creative practice and transformation. In anthropology and performance anthropology transformation is discussed in relation to 'liminality' (Turner 1982). This is the space out of which new understanding grows. It is for example, initiation: that which a boy goes into and a man emerges from, knowing he is a man. It is through such knowing that Damasio's emotion is transformed into feeling and it is through feeling that experience of the world is transformed. Creative rendering is an opportunity for the generation of such knowing. Such rendering may or may not have an audience. It is nevertheless a process that draws upon a deep desire to realise – and its consequent knowledge may be offered up in a variety of forms. Clearly, the mind is known and represented through a variety of means. In his work on consciousness and learning Howard Gardner argues the limitations of scientific

approaches to the mind and argues the need for a more 'literary' style of investigation (Horgan, 1999: 73). Oliver Sacks (1987) does likewise, writing, "to restore the human subject at the centre... we must deepen a case history to a narrative or a tale; only then do we have a 'who' as well as a 'what', a real person... in relation to the physical" (viii).

On a phenomenological level, when I am captured by grief, the world around me is determined for me, to an extent, by my grief. When I am captured by contentment or happiness or elation, the world around me is determined for me, to an extent, by that too. I encounter the world through emotion. It is a contributor to what Gregory Bateson (1972) calls my 'ecology of mind'. It is arguable therefore that emotion deserves to be understood as something different to a temporary divergence from tranquillity, if only because tranquillity is itself a felt encounter. In this respect Humberto Maturana (1994) argues that we live our lives 'in emotion' and that our ongoing 'emotioning' is integral to our participation in the world through which we 'know'. It is within this inter-weaving of experience and explanation ('emotioning' and 'languaging') that the congruence will be found that constructs both learning and the environment for learning. Maturana and Francesco Varela (1987) refer to this inter-weaving or 'braiding' of mood and explanation as a form of 'conversation'. They describe it as the means whereby we 'bring forth our world' – the world and the future we enter constantly.

Participation constructs a form of conditional knowledge. In this respect notions of author-ity need to be contested so that participants can develop forms of explanation appropriate to their unfolding. These have their basis in a feeling response to experience. They require a form of listening and sensitivity akin to that called up in actor training via the body-based improvisation, play and character work that occurs within it. Greater recognition of this may provide greater opportunities for men, to make sense of their participation. But it is not simply a matter of 'men coming to their senses' and 'men realising what is good for them'. Creative work is a deeply sensed negotiation between experience and

the recall, consideration and documentation of experience. It is a methodology that educators need to make accessible to those who might otherwise stand to one side.

Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal (1979, 1992, 1995) has developed dramatic processes that work in such ways. These are structured activities that tap into personal feelings, which are interpreted in political terms. Ostensibly, their function is neither artistic nor therapeutic nor even educational (though they are of course all these things). Boal identifies the games as means for analysing and overcoming oppression. Central to this overcoming is an understanding Boal offers via the term 'spect-actor'. The term contains and defines theatre, which is, according to Boal "the art of looking at ourselves" (Boal 1992: xxx). "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. (Boal 1995: 13)

Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed' is a pedagogical encounter with embodied and emotional experience. Boal addresses the emotional experience of oppression, in a theatrical context, through games designed to challenge the embodied consequences of that oppression. The games are the overcoming of the oppression as distinct from the performance of the overcoming. The practice can be and has been applied to a variety of settings, from drama classrooms in Australia to villages in rural Iran, where traditional power relationships undermine reform. Boal describes these games as forms of "physical reflection on oneself". "The games" he says, "deal with the expressivity of the body as emitter and receiver of messages" (Boal 1992: 60). It is in the body that such knowledge is found. Accordingly, he offers invitations to "to feel what we touch", "to listen to what we hear" and "to see what we look at". Importantly, these invitations are to understand oppression *through* the body and *through* emotion. The more common method - that traditionally favoured in our society by men - is to communicate *about* oppression, *about* the body and *about* emotion. The

personal, as distinct from disengaged, encounter with the body of emotion can be profound. This encounter can be extended through a variety of forms of relationship: the relationship with the self, the other, the environment and abstract knowledge, ideas, concepts and culture. Within relationship lies the opportunity to recognise and act, as a consequence of that recognition. Sustainability is not pursued in isolation. In my experience these games provide opportunities for reluctant males to enter into this form of embodied knowing.

The conversation about embodiment, emotion and vulnerability is rich and far reaching. 'My' involvement in this intrigues me as much as the subject matter. I find it impossible to separate the two. This implies a relationship, which brings with it responsibility. 'I' am now complicit and I have a role in creating the ongoing meaning in which 'I' am participating. This is not solipsism. It is grounded in principles of relativity. By admitting my own participation in the relationship I take responsibility. I am ethically bound. In Heinz von Foerster's words, "it is no longer possible to find an excuse ... by referring to an external reality" (von Foerster & Poerksen 2002: 30).

I place my 'objectivity' in parentheses, as Humberto Maturana would say, (<http://www.enolaqaia.com/EA.html#O>) and regard it as conditional rather than absolute. My vulnerability is that of the man who embraces the opportunity contained in creative experience and in the process encounters the dual aspects of spect-actor.

To conclude, the significant gender imbalance in acting courses must be a consequence of more than social forces. Issues of personal vulnerability and sustainability may be extremely significant. These are encountered as young men experience emotions they find difficult to feel. The expression of feeling, which is central to the form of self-consciousness arising from self-reflection that enables accomplishment in the creative arts, is not easily accessed. Such access is a consequence of more than encounters with supportive others. It is a

consequence also of linguistic models and structures that enable opportunities for the knowing of emotion and the expression of that knowing. This entails the search for a vocabulary as much as it does the search for a form. Some structures, vocabularies and methodologies facilitate this better than others. I argue that greater use of structured creative opportunities will arrive through a greater capacity to dive into, explore and experiment with the means whereby we communicate.

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ⁱ *We feel that to reveal embarrassing or private things... we have given someone something, that, like a primitive person fearing that a photographer will steal his soul, we identify our secrets, our past and their blotches, with our identity, that revealing our habits or losses or deeds somehow makes one less of oneself. But it's just the opposite, more is more is more - more bleeding, more giving... How can these things be mine? Holding me responsible for keeping secret this information is ridiculous. I was born into a town and a family and the town and my family happened to me. I own none of it. It's everyone's. It is shareware. I like it, I like having been a part of it, I would kill or die to protect those who are part of it, but I do not claim exclusivity. Have it. Take it from me. Do with it what you will. Make it useful. This is like making electricity from dirt; it is almost too good to be believed, that we can make beauty from this stuff. (Eggers, 2000: 188)*

ⁱⁱ Between 1990 and 2003 the University of Western Sydney (UWS) graduated 267 students from its Acting program (known by various names during this period; initially Bachelor of Arts - Acting, then from 2002 Bachelor of Performance, Theory and Practice - Acting). The Acting program accepts only about 25 auditioned students each year (often over 300 audition). Within these constraints staff also try to ensure some sort of gender balance. Despite this, of the 267 students who graduated in this time 168 were female and 99 male. (The number of male graduates exceeded those of females in only one year: 1990). Currently there are 180 students in the three years of the UWS Bachelor of Performance, Theory and Practice (with strands in Acting, Dance & Theatremaking); 128 of those enrolled are female, only 52 are male.