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# Solo Auto/biographical Theatre: Towards a process of self-transformation

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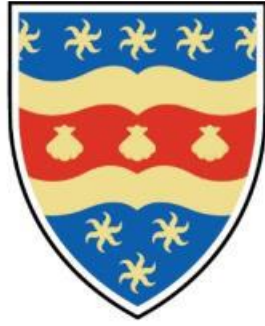
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University of Plymouth

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# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

## **Solo Auto/biographical Theatre: Towards a process of self- transformation**

by

Morris Isaac Cohen  
BA (Hons), MA, MSc.

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Signed ..... *Morris I Cohen* .....

Date ..... 14-08-2022.....

## ABSTRACT

The concept of performance as a transformational experience is not unfamiliar in academic literature; Heddon (2008), Schechner (2013) and Zarrilli (2020) have all written about different aspects of transformations in theatre and performance, including the personal, the social and the political. The specific focus of this Practice as Research PhD is self-transformation and auto/biographical performance. It asks how making, devising and performing a solo auto/biographical piece of work might be a transformational experience for the performer. By transformation, the research refers to an inner shift in perspective on outer circumstances or events, or a change in meaning-making for and by the performer. The methodology revolves around the making of a series of experimental performances, which culminate in an online auto/biographical performance that both compliments and offers an alternative articulation to the written element of the thesis. Both emphasise heuristic processes of personal and inner inquiry, through which one illuminates the nature and meaning of an experience. The self of the researcher is at the heart of the process. The performance practice is carried out 'in conversation' with solo auto/biographical practitioners including Lisa Kron, Deb Margolin, Ken Campbell, Spalding Gray and Selina Thompson. It also explores how the work of Werner Erhard in the field of Transformative Learning, and the thinking of the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski can be applied to solo auto/biographical theatre particularly in regard to their concern with human freedom. The research examines the role of place in personal history and at a personal level; it also explores concepts of Jewishness and Return in the author's own practice. It analyses the practices of others and the author's own work within specific theoretical and philosophical frameworks - in particular Buber's '*I-Thou*' encounter and Heidegger's thinking on possibility, presence and authenticity. The research finally proposes that a mode of performing referred to as 'beyond technique' is akin to Grotowski's *via negativa* and achieves a state of being in which the performer transformatively experiences themselves as whole and complete.

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## INTRODUCTION

### 0.1 The Research Questions

This Practice as Research (PaR) project is an inquiry into the self-transformational potential of solo auto/biographical theatre. The research examines whether the process of making and performing auto/biographical work can fulfil on this potential and be a transformative experience for the performer.<sup>1</sup> I differentiate between transformational and transformative in this way: by transformational, I mean experienced in a particular moment, in the moment of the event itself. By transformative, I mean an experience, process or an event that leads, causes or brings forth a transformational moment at a later time.

The project addresses the following primary question: How - that is, in what ways - can the process of devising, rehearsing, and performing solo auto/biographical theatre occur as a transformative experience for the performer? It also asks whether there are elements of devising a solo auto/biographical performance that can be distinguished as central to the self-transformative process and/or catalysing the self-transformational moment. It asks further, how it might be possible to articulate these in such a way that the process could be made accessible and repeatable for others. By devising, I am referring to the entire through-line of the creative process that can begin with imagining, visualising and thinking about the performance, through periods of writing and editing, researching and reflecting, improvising and rehearsing, and usually ends by performing.

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<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of transformation is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

## **0.2 Research Aims**

The research project examines the proposition that the past, identity and personal history are all self-constructed and that these constructs arise from inherited discourses that may be social and cultural, familial and transgenerational, and/or personal and individual. The aims of this thesis therefore are:

- to examine the self-transformational promise of devising and performing Solo auto/biographical theatre
- to interrogate the liberatory potential of Solo auto/biographical theatre
- to explore from what sources the self-transformational experience might spring.

## **0.3 Research Objectives**

A key objective in this project is to devise and mount a series of solo, auto/biographical performances each of which relates to aspects of my own life. Through these performances I intend to examine and discover which of my own narratives and stories continue to have a constricting influence on my life and my personal potential, and to identify which existing theatre practices can potentially allow me to detach from their grip. The identification and clear articulation of these practices may then allow others to successfully undertake a similar transformative process of their own.

The practice consists of a series of experimental performances that I have devised, written, rehearsed and performed, each with the aim of drawing on my own personal history to reveal, or cast a new light on, any hidden stories that lie 'behind' the dominant narratives

of my life. These dominant stories are stories that I have habitually been told by others, or I have told myself; that I have come either to assume as truths, or I have neglected, ignored or shied away from. Extrapolating from these personal experiences, I seek to identify and articulate how devising and performing solo auto/biographical theatre can draw on established theatre practices to catalyse such moments of self-transformation, so that I can use and apply what I learn from myself and about myself to the wider practice of solo auto/biographical theatre and expand the existing knowledge about the form.

## 0.4 The Performances

Year	Event	Venue	Title and Form
June 20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> 2021	Thesis Performance - Invited audience	Zoom performances Online	<b>Nothing - an Experiment in Encounter</b> Scripted performances. Discussed in Chapter 5 of the Thesis
May 10 <sup>th</sup> 2021	Scratch Performance - Invited audience	Zoom Performance Online	<b>Nothing - an experiment in encounter</b> To CANI-net, short version of the revised scripted performance.
March 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2021	Scratch Performance - invited audience	Zoom Performance Online	<b>Nothing - an experiment in encounter</b> Revised/edited version of a new scripted performance. Discussed in Chapter 5 of the Thesis
January 27 <sup>th</sup> 2021	PEP <sup>2</sup> TALKS University of Plymouth	Zoom Performance Online	<b>Nothing - an experiment in encounter</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> version of a new scripted performance. Discussed in Chapter 5 of the Thesis
May 14 <sup>th</sup> 2020	DAWN private support group invited audience	Zoom Performance Online	<b>Dreams in Lockdown</b> Scripted performance
April 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2020	PEP TALKS University of Plymouth	Zoom Performance Online	<b>Dreams in Lockdown</b> Scripted performance.
January 15 <sup>th</sup> 2020	PEP TALKS University of Plymouth	University of Plymouth UK	<b>There be Monsters</b> Extemporaneous work, generated from a prepared format.
October 20 <sup>th</sup> 2019	Drop the Story Festival	Ashburton Arts Centre Devon UK	<b>Sign of the Times</b> Extemporaneous work, generated from a prepared format.
December 18 <sup>th</sup> 2018	Private View - Invited audience	Ashburton Arts Centre Devon UK	<b>Come Learn What I've Learned</b> Improvised work, generated from a prepared format.
October 27 <sup>th</sup> 2018	PEP TALKS - University of Plymouth - A Lecture Performance	University of Plymouth UK	<b>Life and Times of Ken Campbell</b> A prepared talk, with a long, spontaneous questions and answers session.
October 26 <sup>th</sup> 2018	Drop the Story Festival	Riverstone Centre Buckfastleigh Devon UK	<b>A Work - in - Progress</b> Extemporaneous work, generated from a prepared format. Discussed in Chapter 4 of the thesis.
May 31 <sup>st</sup> 2018	50 <sup>th</sup> Reunion The institute for Youth Leaders Cohort 43 1968-1969	Acre/Acco Israel	<b>Untitled Work</b> Extemporaneous work, generated from a prepared format. Discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis.
November 29 <sup>th</sup> 2017	PEP TALKS University of Plymouth	University of Plymouth UK	<b>State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump.</b> A revised version-a rehearsed and scripted, 'black-box theatre' style performance.
November 15 <sup>th</sup> 2017	Narrative Coaching Group Reunion	Cossington Somerset UK	<b>State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump.</b> A rehearsed and scripted, 'black-box theatre' style performance.
September 14 <sup>th</sup> 2017	Drop the Story Festival	Dartington Devon UK	<b>1966</b> Improvised work generated from a prepared format. Discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis.
November 11 <sup>th</sup> 2016	Nearly Real Solo Theatre Festival	Riverstone Centre Buckfastleigh Devon UK	<b>1966</b> Improvised work generated from a prepared format. Discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Figure 1. The sequence of performances that constitute the research process in reverse chronological order

<sup>2</sup> Performance-Experience-Presence (PEP) is the name of the research group for the performing arts at University of Plymouth.

## 0.5 Research Methodology

This PhD project follows a Practice as Research (PaR) methodology, through which certain new knowledges can only arise directly from practice itself. Nelson states that PaR ‘draws upon such approaches as hermeneutics and phenomenology but places even more emphasis on enactive perception in the experience of ‘doing-knowing’ (2013: 98). Practice as Research inquiry is multi-modal, inside which three separate domains of knowledge are reciprocal, iterative and interactive: these are *Know-That*, *Know-What* and *Know-How*. Nelson considers *Know-That* as consisting of scholarly or academic knowledge and conceptual frameworks; *Know-What* consists of knowledge gained by critical reflection, and *Know-How* includes tacit or embodied knowledge. He argues that *Know-How* combined with *Know-What* in relation to *Know-That* maximizes the potential of a contribution to knowledge (2013: 37-47). *Know-What* might also include practitioner knowledge and lineages, and in this research project this includes knowledge derived from interviewing expert practitioners and watching and reflecting on other experienced performers’ work.

Nelson also states positively that advanced students who undertake PaR projects invariably carry with them the baggage of prior educational experience and, typically, ‘specialist training’ which allows them to ‘dialogue with the situation’. He includes holding first or master’s level qualifications and having significant professional experience (2013: 42). My baggage includes:

- Study of, and work in, Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Family and Narrative Therapy, Psychotherapy, Creative Writing and Creative Conflict Transformation through the Arts.

- Work in the field of Transformative Education, Mediation and Coaching.<sup>3</sup>
- Participation in both the counterculture of the 1960s and The Human Potential Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup>
- On-going participation in the field of Personal Transformation.

Despite the fact that at the beginning of the research project I considered myself a relatively novice theatre practitioner, I also brought some associated understandings from the fields of coaching and therapy about such matters as: presence, authenticity and curiosity;<sup>5</sup> an intuitive sense of process and trust; an awareness of the importance of relationship and communication skills such as empathy and listening. As part of the iterative nature of this research inquiry I have chosen to use the Patrice Pavis questionnaire for students who were unfamiliar with semiology as a springboard for understanding my own performances (Pavis, 1985).

## 0.6 Heuristic Research

An integral aspect of my PaR is Moustakas' method of Heuristic Inquiry (2015: 309). It most closely reflects both the overall process of the research project and the specific journey I undertake each time I devise a performance. The term *heuristic* derives from the original Greek verb *εὐρίσκω* (euriskō) meaning 'I find' or 'I discover'. Moustakas describes the heuristic process as a 'way of knowing' and suggests that 'in such a process not only is

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<sup>3</sup> By coaching, I mean here the field of personal or life coaching that has developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which the coach focusses specifically on enabling another to harness their personal potential to maximize their own goals and realise their own aspirations. It is an egalitarian and transparent approach to conversations that allow people to discover new meanings for themselves. While they may have similar attributes, I am not referring to such fields as sports coaching, fitness coaching, acting coaching or voice coaching

<sup>4</sup> The Human Potential Movement was a popular counterculture that emerged in the mid 1960s with a focus of maximizing human potential. By potential participants in the movement meant fulfilling to the fullest degree possible any currently unrealised human capacity or ability.

<sup>5</sup> I am aware that presence and authenticity are problematised concepts both in theatre and in auto/biography. I will consider presence, authenticity and being authentic in more detail in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.



knowledge extended, but the self of the researcher is illuminated' (1990: 10-11). Moreover, Sultan suggests that one important aspect of any heuristic inquiry is auto/biographical and 'includes personal history, memory, imagination, and perception, fusing past, present, and future' (2019: 5). Moustakas points out that Heuristic Research emphasises 'self search, self dialogue and self discovery' (Moustakas, 1990: 11) and suggests that this methodology 'flows out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration' (Moustakas, 2015: 309). These observations fit neatly inside the PaR framework and match the specific intentions of my practice.

As part of my ongoing self-inquiry, I draw on psychologist Ellen Langer's practices in mindfulness who writes that 'in meditation the mind becomes quieter and active thought is discouraged [...] meditation techniques are said to result in a state that has been called *de-automatization*. In this state, old categories break down and the individual is no longer trapped by stereotypes'. The result, she says, is a freedom from rigid distinctions (Langer, 2014 [1989]: 80, italics in the original).

Moustakas asserts that '[m]ethods of heuristic research are open ended. [...] There is no exclusive list that would be appropriate for every heuristic investigation' (2015: 312). He describes the methods of Heuristic Research as including an '*autobiographical immersion*' and includes in this both self interviews, and conversations with others (2015: 313, my emphasis). During this doctoral project, as well as regularly interviewing myself, I have interviewed other practitioners. I have researched solo auto/biographical performers by watching live performances, viewing video recordings, and photographs, exploring their own writing and writings by others about them. I have applied their thinking and ideas - about devising, writing, rehearsing performing and connecting with the audience through solo performance - to my own practices, in order to delve further into the phenomenon of self-transformation through solo performance.

Data has been generated, mapped and captured through keeping personal diaries, logs, journals, scrapbooks and impromptu field notes, viewing artwork and reading poetry. Finally, I have been able to research various artefacts in the family archive I have inherited and have in my possession. All of these constitute an auto/biographical immersion. Moustakas insightfully states, the researcher 'lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states' (1990: 28). Each of these states contributes to the transformational, artistic, aesthetic development of the pieces I devise.

## **0.7 Why this project?**

Heddon states that she wants to believe that autobiographical performance can be 'a transformational act' (2008: 3). However, it appears that there is a lacuna in the detailed understanding of the processes of self-transformation that may take place during the making of solo auto/biographical theatre. Similarly, there seems to be a lack of studies that specifically inquire into the dynamics, components and underpinnings of acts of transformation, in particular of self-transformation. For example: what are the components and nature of self-transformation; how do they inter-act; what catalyses or promotes them; what prevents them; what are the enablers and what are the barriers, where do they lead and how are they sustained? The intention of this research is to contribute to and reduce this gap in knowledge and make explicit how solo auto/biographical theatre can be a process of self-transformation for the performer.

## 0.8 Distinguishing Transformation

The term self-transformation is relatively new in the fields of psychology and personal growth. Prior to the 1970s, there is little reference to self-transformation. It was more often called personal growth, the pinnacle of which was considered to be 'self-actualization' or 'self-realisation' (Maslow, 1954: 149-180). The term transformation seems to have migrated, during the 1960s, from the realm of politics, particularly in the USA, and especially from activity in the civil rights and protest movements, into the rapidly expanding Human Potential Movement.<sup>6</sup> In the political realm, the goal for the individual was to bring about a social transformation. This implied making a personal pledge or commitment to freedom through social action and the adoption of a politically informed, personal identity in the pursuit of happiness for all. These pledges were motivated by a belief in the feasibility of ending social, economic and racial oppression or enslavement.

Subsequently, it seems that this concept of transformation coalesced in the Human Potential Movement and became referred to as self or personal transformation. American educator and author George Leonard writes that voting, protesting, demonstrating and civil disobedience are simply not enough to cause a social transformation, and that a new curriculum for living that fundamentally advances new states of being for human beings is required. In other words, individuals are expected first to transform themselves in order to transform the wider system (Leonard, 1972: 206-237).

There is no agreed definition of transformation; different disciplines employ different terms of reference. In nursing, Gail Holland Wade considers transformation to be a multi-

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<sup>6</sup> This is not a central issue in the research. In all the reading I have undertaken, I have not discovered anyone else who makes this observation. However, an internet search using N-Gram on Google Books supports this idea and shows a marked rise in the term 'personal transformation' during the 1960s and a steady rise in the term 'self-transformation' from 1966 peaking in 2007.

dimensional concept that involves expanding consciousness (1998: 713). In art therapy, Beaumont refers to transformation as self-development towards a greater sense of wholeness and integration (2018: 80). She writes that transformation involves not just a change in world view, but also creates shifts in how a person experiences themselves and others (2010: unpaginated). The terms transformation and self-transformation are also often used interchangeably. In his book, *The Unfolding Self* (1988), Metzner uses both. He describes the components of transformation as including: consciousness, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, assumptions, resistances, values, and motive. He states that other expressions that signify 'this realm of human experience' also include self-actualization and individuation (1988: 3). In the field of education, O'Sullivan describes transformative learning as

experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. (2002: 11)

Personal transformation is defined by the psychologist Marilyn Ferguson as the 'state of being conscious of one's consciousness' (1981: 68). In 2002, in a private document to their leader body (of which I was a part at the time), the training and development organisation, Landmark Education (now Landmark Worldwide) describes transformation as 'the genesis of a new realm of possibility' (Landmark Education, 2001: unpaginated), and educator Werner Erhard states that the word transformation names a distinct discipline, which 'explores the nature of Being' (in Bodek, 1984: unpaginated).

For the purposes of this project, I begin with the following working definition: self-transformation is an inner experience - subjective and individual - that could include a potential shift in attitude, bias, belief, value, or a stance one has adopted. Such an experience engenders the sense of unhitching oneself from a 'problem saturated description' of life (White, 1989a: 37) that constricts or prohibits a person from fulfilling the possibilities of their

life or restricts them from reaching their potential. These 'stories' are equally likely to be external, they have been invisibly imposed from outside, or internally, by our own personal narratives - that is, the stories we tell ourselves and our self-evaluations. Personal potential may be expressed in any number of realms, for example: artistic, academic, emotional or spiritual potential. This kind of self-transformation results in an expanded sense of personal freedom.

I write further about transformation in relation to my key interlocutors in the first chapter of this thesis and in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.

### **0.9 Distinguishing Self and Identity**

The Danish philosopher Dan Zahavi asks 'What is a self? Does it exist in reality or is it a mere social construct - or perhaps a neurologically induced illusion? If something like a self exists, what role does it play in our conscious life, and how and when does it emerge' (2005: 1)? Indeed, the concepts of self and identity are problematised and intertwined.

Philosopher Christine Korsgaard emphasises that:

you are the author of your actions, and responsible for them. And yet at the same time it is in choosing your actions that you create that *identity*. What this means is that you constitute *yourself* as the author of your actions in the very act of choosing them. I am fully aware that this sounds paradoxical. How can you constitute *yourself*, create yourself, unless you are already there? Call this the paradox of self constitution [...] (2009: 20, my emphasis).

Philosopher Jesús Adrián Escudero states that '[t]he contemporary discussion of the self is highly interdisciplinary in nature and shows the complexity of this phenomenon' (2014: 7).

Self and identity are clearly fundamental to this project which considers who steps on stage, who performs, whose story is told, who is telling the story, who transforms as a result of the process of self-transformation.<sup>7</sup> Anderson, Willett and Myers argue that

modern philosophy in the West championed the individual. Extending into contemporary moral and political thought is the idea that the self is a free, rational chooser and actor - an autonomous agent. (2021: unpaginated)

However, they claim, this minimizes 'the personal and ethical import of unchosen circumstances' (2021: unpaginated) and that 'the multiple, sometimes fractious sources of social identity constituted at the intersections of one's gender, sexual orientation, race, class, age, ethnicity, ability, and so forth, are ignored' (2021: unpaginated).

Philosopher Thomas Metzinger states categorically '[n]obody ever was or had a self. All that ever existed were conscious self-models that could not be recognized as models' (2003: 1). What he refers to as '[t]he phenomenal self is not a thing, but a process' (2003: 1). Escudero explains that in the hermeneutic approach, self is considered a narrative construction. He states that from this position, 'The self, so to speak, is the product of conceiving and organizing one's life in a certain way' (2014: 8). He concludes that the 'narrative self is, consequently, an open-ended construction that is under constant revision' (2014: 8). For the philosopher Martin Buber, self becomes either more fragmented or more unified through its quality of relationship to others. Buber asserts that it is only one's relationship with another that leads to a state of wholeness. Self becomes whole when there is an 'encounter' between two beings (1970: 62). It is only in the 'encounter' that the 'I' becomes whole. The idea of 'encounter' is explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

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<sup>7</sup> I provide definitions of story and narrative in Chapter Two.

Throughout this research, I explore what it might mean to be a person with agency and the possibility of transforming, and how these different approaches to understanding self, and the concept of 'I', may play a part.

## **0.10 Distinguishing Solo**

American theatre director, Jo Bonney, suggests that 'more than any other kind of live performance, the solo show expects and demands the active involvement of people in the audience. They are watched as they watch, they are directly addressed, their energy resonates with that of the lone artist's' (2000: xiii). Rebecca Schneider states that 'the 20th century was uniquely hospitable to, and enamoured of, solo performance, with an increasing fascination as the century wore on' (2005: 24). She suggests that it is a term equally applied to visual arts, film, dance, poetry and theatre (2005: 27). In a description that still holds true, Bonney describes the solo performers working in the 1970s and 1980s as 'wonderfully diverse' and 'finding their roots in 'vaudeville, theatre, cabaret, stand-up comedy, poetry, the visual arts and dance' (2000: xii).

U.K. based performer Selina Thompson (whose work is discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis) tells interviewer Phil Cleaves:

I'm a really big believer that there's no such thing as a solo artist [...] the more people you have focusing on their specific skillset the more head space there is for making the concept as strong as possible [...] So I let people with the skills and the training and the knowledge and the expertise do what needs to be done to fulfil my vision. My job is to make sure my vision is as clear as possible. A big part of what those collaborators are doing is interrogating all of the dredging and the research. They force me to be explicit [...] (Cleaves, n.d. a: unpaginated)

In whichever genre, solo work is rarely entirely solo. Making auto/biographical performances invariably involves collaborating with others. The practitioners who appear throughout this thesis - Ken Campbell, Spalding Gray, Lisa Kron, Deb Margolin and Selina Thompson - all worked with directors and / or dramaturgs. Many solo performers collaborate with designers, lighting and sound technicians. Performing in arts centres and theatres can involve collaborating with a team of other professionals. The performance itself often relies on the participation of the audience - for example, in Tim Crouch's *Oak Tree* (2015) at the London National Theatre temporary space, or Duncan Macmillan's *Every Brilliant Thing* (2016) at the Barrow Street Theatre in New York. Even when there is no direct participation, the solo performer strives to create a virtual *conversation* with the audience.

In this context, of creating a conversation with the audience, it is important, at this early stage of the thesis, to clarify that, in my practice, the performances I made were specifically for the communities and / or social networks in which I move and belong - for example, for my family and friends, my neighbours and work colleagues, and for my spiritual and religious congregation. It was not my intention 'to tour' my performances. The majority of the people in my audiences were invited specifically to bear witness to the new aspects of my story I was attempting to tell about myself and my life. The performances were made with people I knew in mind, whom I thought would be keen to hear, see and know about my process of self development and my experience of self-transformation. This is an important of my practice, because in this way my new story of myself has the opportunity to circulate more widely within my community, and I can become better known as my new 'transformed' account of my self. Cottle writes that when my 'the call of [my] story' is received by the listener 'genuinely', that is without judgement or evaluation, it is the 'ultimate act of affirming the Other' (2002: 535-549); my Being is affirmed through the eyes of others. Howarth states



that 'the meaning of community is contested' (2001: 224). In my practice I understand communities as networks of shared conversations, stories and narratives, and I believe that this social phenomenon, of transformed personal narratives being witnessed and circulating within given communities, promotes and nurtures increased awareness, compassion and tolerance of others. I return to the topic of bearing witness in Chapter Three.

However, like theatre academic and cultural critic, Stephen Greer, 'I am less interested in preserving a strict definition as a work of a solitary performer' than I am in discovering how such a 'broad range of forms, traditions and contexts' (2019: 4) can all provide a fertile framework specifically for self-transformation. For the purposes of this research project, I am following Misri Dey's relatively catholic definition whereby she defines solo 'in a making and performing context as being where one person is responsible for creating and holding the vision of a piece of work, from idea to performance, although others may be involved in its making' (2018: 3).

### **0.11 Distinguishing Theatre**

Throughout this project, I refer to solo auto/biographical theatre as opposed to the more frequently used auto/biographical *performance*. While this is not a central debate in the thesis, nor is it a primary concern in my practice, it is nonetheless worth clarifying my choice. Indeed, as early as 1979, *The Drama Review* (TDR) produced an edition of the journal entitled 'Autoperformance' in which editor Michael Kirby writes

these performances overlap a rather vague theatre mode variously called 'Artist's Performance', 'Art Performance', or 'Performance Art'. These terms are vague, in part, because they are sociological rather than functional or esthetic. (1979: 2)

Emphasising this point, performer Laurie Anderson has said that 'the best thing about the term performance art is that it's so ambiguous it includes just about everything you might

want to do' (in Bonney, 2000: xii). The theatre critic Zoé Barnes, writing almost twenty years later, states that 'defining the exact boundaries between theatre and performance art can be complex' (2017: unpaginated).

Although, as Woo suggests, '[p]erformance art and theatre are both rooted in the same practices and ideas' (2014: unpaginated), I believe it is possible to make some distinction in order to point to some of the main concerns of this thesis. In referring to my practice as theatre, I am following Richard Schechner who writes that 'performance is an inclusive term' (2003: xvii) or a meta-category. Within this, theatre 'can be considered a specialised kind of performance' (2003: 70) which is distinguished from other forms of performance by its specific type of aesthetic which incorporates symbolism, metaphor and iconography on stage, so that everything is both itself and something else simultaneously. In particular, regarding auto/biographical theatre, the body of the performer is both signifying and signifier; it is the communication and the communicator, the message and the messenger. This can be contrasted with widespread understandings or expectations of performance art as emphasising presentation over representation. Indeed, performance artist Marina Abramović has said that 'To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake ... The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real' (in O'Hagan, 2010: unpaginated). My own intention is to differentiate, both for myself and my audiences, between my practice and the practices of others perceived as avant-garde or more experimental performance. I have thus chosen to use the term auto/biographical theatre to signal that I am researching an aesthetic and creative form, within which the performer is 'managing' the ongoing tensions between the signified and the signifier to make continuous aesthetic and artistic choices.

## 0.12 Distinguishing Auto/biography

Wolff-Michael Roth states emphatically that auto/biography is always biography (2005: 3), and psychologist Michelle Fine describes auto/biography as working the self-other hyphen (1994: 70). I am choosing to use the slash when writing auto/biography to indicate and highlight the instability of both biography and autobiography. It suggests that each genre co-exists on a continuum, rather than existing separately or independently of the other. Not every story is entirely a self-story. In other words, an author writing what is ostensibly a biography may also be falling back on their own self-story and perspectives, and an author writing an autobiography may equally be drawing on the life stories of others. It also suggests differences in emphasis. Sometime there might be more emphasis on self-experience, the auto, and sometimes on the life-story, the bio.

Auto/biography is a complicated term (Smith and Watson, 2001: 1-3). Therefore, in the context of Solo auto/biographical theatre, I rely on Lejeune's definition of auto/biographical: that

the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical, and that the narrator and the principal character are identical' and that the point of view and/or perspective of the performance are those of the author-narrator-character. (Lejeune, 1989: 4)

Auto/biographies can vary in form from personal diaries written over a lifetime, meant to remain private, to those written specifically for popular reading and intended from the outset for publication. However, both on the page and on the stage, they are all shaped by recollection and memory. As novelist Graham Greene aptly wrote in 1971 at the beginning of his own book, 'an autobiography is only a "'sort of life"' (1973: 9).

### 0.13 Literature Review: Auto/biographical Performance

Deirdre Heddon's important work, *Autobiography and Performance* (2008), offers an overview of autobiographical performance in the UK and the USA during the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It introduces some of the 'key concerns implicated in performance that take personal material as their primary source' (2008: 12). The key concerns she included at the time of writing were identity, testimony, place, and ethics (2008: 12). Heddon acknowledges the limitations that focussing her research to the UK and the USA may place on our wider understanding of 'identity and its practice in daily life' (2008: 12). She argues that '[t]he translation of personal - or autobiographical - material into live performance was inarguably tied to consciousness-raising activities which focused analysis specifically on women's experiences' (under the banner of the "personal is political")' (2008: 21). To emphasise the importance of the Women's Movement, from a long list of performers of the time, she points out that Spalding Gray is the only heterosexual, white male (2008: 2).

Heddon defines autobiographical performance as 'a broad term which encompasses examples of solo autobiographical work, community and applied drama, oral narrative and oral history performance, verbatim drama, documentary drama, testimonial performance, performance art and instances of site-specific and time-based practice' (2008: 11). She observes that

Personal experience can easily become an unwitting but persuasive guarantor of truth: because I saw and felt then it must necessarily be so. In this scenario I become the evidence ... Assuming an equation between "experience" and "truth" is to forget that experience is always implicated in the structure of language since it is at the level of language that experience is interpreted, determining what, specifically, any event is able to mean. (Heddon, 2008: 26)

Later, Heddon turns her attention to the overlaps between history, trauma, testimony and confession and asks, 'what is the mechanism for learning from the past ... how does that transference take place?' (2008: 6) She writes of 'robbing the past of its power' (2008: 75) and cites Suzette Henke who suggests that 'self is an 'enabling myth' (2008: 55). Heddon suggests that it is the recovery of this self that enables recovery from trauma, often through the process of rehearsals. This perspective is vital to this research and is explored in further detail in Chapter Two of this thesis. Heddon also examines the associations between place and self, stating that 'we might think of autobiography as cartography of self' (2008: 88). She explores a number of performances that echo themes that I will explore in Chapter Three, including, for example, returning to familiar locations from the past, homesickness and nostalgia.

Smith and Watson's *Reading Autobiography - A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001) provides a historical and contextual overview of the study of autobiography. Its chapters are invaluable in distinguishing the differences between writing life narrative, biography and autobiography, the status of the different kinds of autobiographical subject, the components of an autobiographical act, and strategies for reading. For example, the authors begin by distinguishing life writing as 'a general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject', whereas life narrative is a somewhat narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography (2001: 3). While both biography and autobiography report on the life that can be observed by others, the key distinction between the two is that an autobiographical account also describes a self that is experienced only by the individual. Indeed, Smith and Watson suggest that two selves are operating simultaneously in auto/biographical writing:

One is the self that others see - the social, historical person, with achievements, personal appearance, social relationships. These are 'real' attributes of a person living in the world. But there is also the self experienced only by that person, the self felt from the inside that the writer can never get 'outside of'. The 'inside', or personally experienced, self has a history. While it may not be meaningful to an objective 'history of the times', it is a history of self-observation, not a history observed by others. (2001: 6)

Using an extensive range of examples from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Smith and Watson map out the debates, issues and concerns that are fundamental to present day understandings of autobiography and therefore later to autobiographical theatre and / or performance. These include autobiographical truth, memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency, all of which I discuss throughout this thesis.

Smith and Watson distinguish the diverse ways that the Greek words *autos*, *bios* and *graph* (self, life, write) - that together make up the word *autobiography* (self-life-writing) - can be expressed, both in written form and in performance. As they state succinctly in their later publication, *Interfaces - Women Autobiography/Image/ Performance*, 'the autobiographical is not a transparent practice [...] it is a term with a complex history' (2002: 8). The book, *Reading Autobiography - A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Smith and Watson, 2001), details this history and the many practices of self representation that have been employed by artists over time. These include the poems of Sappho of Lesbos (c. 600 B.C.E.) and the first generally acknowledged book-length autobiographical narrative in the West, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, that was probably written around 397 C.E., through to Samuel Pepy's diary in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and on to Whitman's poems and Thoreau's essays in the 1800's (2001: 83-109).

Smith and Watson contend that 'memory is a subjective form of evidence, not externally verifiable; rather, it is asserted on the subject's authority' (2001: 6). The authors

argue that narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered (2001: 16-24) and

for life narrators, personal memories are the primary archival source. They may have recourse to other kinds of sources—letters, journals, photographs, conversations - and to their knowledge of a historical moment. But the usefulness of such evidence for their stories lies in the ways in which they employ that evidence to support, supplement, or offer commentary on their idiosyncratic acts of remembering. In autobiographical narratives, imaginative acts of remembering always intersect with such rhetorical acts as assertion, justification, judgment, conviction, and interrogation. That is, life narrators address readers whom they want to persuade of their version of experience. (2001: 6)

Smith and Watson are suggesting that it is precisely these intersections, between both the inner and the outer worlds, the seen-by-others-self and the felt-from-the-inside-self, that can provoke resonance and interest, whereby the reader is 'challenged to observe the biases and fantasies of these young protagonists and discover discrepancies between how each views himself at various moments and how we, as readers, regard the limitations or the blind spots of their knowledge' (2001: 8). Smith and Watson suggest that when the life that is being written or performed 'is expanded to include how one has become who she or he is at a given moment in an ongoing process of reflection, clearly the autobiographical story requires more explaining' (2001: 1-2). This explaining is picked up by Maggie Gale and Viv Gardner.

Gale and Gardner's *Auto/biography and identity* (2004a) builds on Smith and Watson's work explicitly and applies itself more specifically to the field of theatre and performance. It extends the issues in autobiographical writing to include, for example, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, public and private life/self, agency and security. In the introduction to this edited volume, Gale and Gardner argue that 'the notion of performance and performativity is often used as a framing device in the process of foregrounding the mechanisms of autobiography ... and identity formation' (2004b: 1). While Gale and Gardner's

focus is specifically on female performers and actors, many of the issues that the contributors highlight are relevant to my own reflexive process as a researcher. In particular, the idea of self-agency and a person's ability to unhitch from circumstances or decisions in the past and to discover security in themselves, is key to the exploration of self-transformation and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

In her chapter about the black American playwright, Adrienne Kennedy, Elaine Aston explains how Kennedy's autobiography, *people who led to my plays* (1987, no capital letters in the original), employs an approach which 'moves away from a single unique subject' and 'takes in the social context of the auto/biographical subjects' (2004: 60-61). This social context includes family, friends, teachers and all the inherent 'complexities and contradictions' of growing up within a particular culture with values that often clash with the wider surrounding society. Aston observes that Kennedy uses none of the conventional meaning-making strategies of autobiography. Events are not commented upon, explained or pulled together. Rather, Aston observes, Kennedy writes in fragmented, discontinuous moments of remembering (2004: 61).

Additionally, Aston suggests that 'there is no attempt to establish a continuous thread of telling' (2004: 61). *people who led to my plays* both looks and reads like a cross between a textual scrap book, a collage and a fairy tale (much like my own reflective journals), containing entries, sketches and photographs that vary widely from, for example: 'People on Old Maid Cards (1936 age 5)' (Kennedy, 1987: 3), to *Frankenstein* (Kennedy, 1987: 24), *Sherlock Holmes* and *Abe Lincoln* (Kennedy, 1987: 25), *Myself* (Kennedy, 1987: 80), *Our Family at Camp* (Kennedy, 1987: 97-98) all contributing to the sense that an identity, a life, an auto/bio/graphy is continuously being written/lived/constituted from seemingly unrelated



and unconnected fragments/shapes of living, more kaleidoscopic and shifting than monochromatic and static.

In her chapter entitled 'Troubling Identities: Claire Dowie's Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt', in *Auto/biography and identity*, Gabriele Griffin interrogates the stability of identity in performance, and foregrounds the split between: a) *the referent* - in this case Dowie herself, who stands outside performed time; b) *the performer* or performing self, i.e. Dowie on stage, live, in public, acting as the narrator, and c) *the performed self*, Dowie as the subject of the performance, the character as she was in the past. Griffin explains that these positions are not stable; they 'slip and slide' as Dowie moves between the past and the present. Griffin cites McKenzie who argues that it is this *betweenness* that 'allows for dominant social norms to be suspended, questioned, played with, transformed' (in Griffin, 2004: 156).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Griffin poses a crucial question: 'is it possible for a woman [but more widely, in the context of this research project, for a person] to negotiate her identity on *her* own terms (2004: 154, italics in the original)? As Dowie asks in her performance, *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt*

Isn't there anybody here who is insanely jealous that [...] they weren't born with the opportunity to do anything they wanted to do without having to apologise or justify or explain or feel guilty or feel like a freak to be ridiculed or persecuted or ostracised ... [?] (Dowie, in Griffin, 2004: 165)

Griffin refers to this question as being in a 'gender-neutral terrain' (2004: 165). Similarly, this research is asking, if it *is* possible, then what does it take to negotiate one's identity on one's own terms?

In a similar vein, Catherine McLean-Hopkins' chapter suggests that Bobby Baker's autobiographical performances and the process of devising the performance 'appear to be a

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<sup>8</sup> This autobiographical mechanism of destabilising, stymieing and undermining identity are central to my own efforts to distinguish the transformational moment in solo auto/biographical theatre.

personal strategy for survival' (McLean-Hopkins, 2004: 239). This raises a number of important questions: Which Bobby Baker wants to survive? Is it the woman, the character, the persona, the performer, the political activist? How does she use the devising process as a strategy for survival? What does she mean by survival? Baker describes her own engagement with Dialectical Behavioural Therapy and its way of providing people with ways to think about the impact on them of their way of living, as a platform for her next live performance (2004: 251), as well as its value to her in relation to her own mental well being.

Jenn Stephenson touches further on this question of survival in *Performing Autobiography - Contemporary Canadian Drama* (2013). She describes autobiography as an evolving process of 'self-creating and transformation' and suggests that it is possible to 'remake one's identity and write a new future or magically even a new past' (2013: 4). She reasserts Lejeune's position that 'telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as a complete subject - it is a fantasy' (Lejeune, in Stephenson, 2013: 3). According to Stephenson,

a self-story must always be incomplete. In the narrative of one's own life, events are selected, shaped, and sequenced. Other events are forgotten, elided, or intentionally omitted. Autobiography thus is always a fictional construction. (Stephenson, 2013: 3)

Stephenson takes a very similar position to my own. She argues persuasively that (what she refers to as psychologically and I would refer to as ontologically) there is no self without the narratives and stories that individuals continually invent, shape and organise into what becomes their lived experience. As she states 'we are our memories. I am the stories that I compose about myself' (2013: 14-15).

Stephenson suggests that autobiographical recounting invariably arises from what she terms unresolved crisis; she names conflict or tension as examples (2013: 15). In *Performing Autobiography*, she argues that contemporary autobiography as a field has moved away from

mapping the life achievements of great men and women (Stephenson emphasises that it is mostly men) and has shifted to embracing more ordinary subjects, living lives that are far from finished. More contemporary auto/biographers are not waiting for the crisis to be ultimately resolved but are 'taking up the story as a means to confront the crisis head-on' (2013: 16). She proposes that 'autobiographical performance provides a vehicle for the creation of identity, a way to speak oneself into being' (2013: 10) and she notes that 'The immediacy of live performance shared with the present audience fosters the sense of a life in progress and remains open to performative revision' (2013: 16). This accords with my earlier proposition regarding the importance of the audience and the performer being actively witnessed by their own community (in section 0.10) and is one of the important threads I have woven into my practice and into this thesis. She also reiterates an important tenet of my own practice when she states that

Although narrative naturally arises out of lived experience as we recount the stories of our lives, conversely, the storehouse of experience - the self - is not only recorded in autobiographical self-stories but is in fact created out of those narratives. (Stephenson, 2013: 14)

In other words, we are trapped inside a viscous circle of our own making, wherein our stories become the reality of our lived experience and our lived experience is the story we tell. It is this trap that my practice in solo auto/biographical theatre intends to perforate. Stephenson names these stories as 'fictions', not untruths or pretences but constructions, 'products of autobiography' (2013: 15).

*Performing Autobiography* analyses in detail a series of what Stephenson calls 'millennial meta-autobiographies' (2013: 17). These are recent plays where the autobiographer stands 'at one remove' and 'the theatricality occurs when what are seemingly solid boundaries between ontological worlds are breached or penetrated' (2013: 47). They

use a play-within-a-play structure that relates to ‘the creation of a multiplicity of nested fictional worlds’. As these moments of ontological ambiguity occur, the characters gain access to new connections and new insights which generate a certain freedom. That is, the transformative process is recruited to reconfigure past present and future selves that allow the characters to take up new positions, new roles and new possibilities. As Stephenson writes, ‘[I]f stories express our sense of self, who we are *and how we got that way* (2013: 7, my emphasis). Stephenson engages with playwrights who use this metatheatrical form not only so she can explore the mechanisms of autobiographical writing but to discover how paradoxically ‘the fictionalised act of self-storytelling can bring out profound actual-world effects’ (2013: 4).

Stephenson explains that ‘autobiographical subjects delve into crisis to relive it but also to live it from a new perspective, to reshape their connection to this crisis and to position themselves for survival’ (2013: 16). To illustrate this phenomenon, she examines the nine Canadian plays included in the book in which the characters (who are all fictional) experience some form of violent event including rape, murder and death by suicide. For the purposes of this literature review, I will refer only to *Perfect Pie* (1999) by Judith Thompson and *Drawer Boy* (1999) by Michael Healey in order to explore more fully what McLean-Hopkins might have meant when she referred to Bobby Baker’s ‘strategies for survival’.<sup>9</sup>

Stephenson clarifies that autobiography as self-story ‘fosters the assimilation of author, narrator and protagonist under the single pronoun “I”’. But from the perspective of the autobiographical story as aesthetic creation, these three roles do not share ontological

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<sup>9</sup> Writing the thesis in 2020 I was unable to see these plays as live theatre but for the purposes of more fully understanding Stephenson’s description of the action, I was able to watch movie versions of both. *Perfect Pie* (2002) was directed by Barbara Willis Sweete, from a script by Judith Thompson. The film was based on Thompson’s play of the same name. *The Drawer Boy* (2017) was directed by Arturo Pérez Torres and Aviva Armour-Ostroff, an adaptation of Michael Healey’s 1999 play *The Drawer Boy*. Both are Canadian films.

status; they reside instead in a series of nested worlds' (2013: 25). Envisioning these nested worlds as three concentric rings, the outer ring, World<sup>a</sup>, is the actual *real-world* of the autobiographical subject; the inner ring, in World<sup>b</sup>, is the narrator who voices the subject's thoughts. She is a fictional creation. In the innermost circle, World<sup>c</sup>, resides the narrator's character, the protagonist. She is entirely subject to the control of the narrator (Stephenson, 2013: 25). Stephenson argues that auto/biographical performance highlights the separation of these roles (2013: 25). However, in both *Perfect Pie* and *The Drawer Boy*, there is a breaching of these three worlds, out of which arises a breakthrough in memory, a novel and unfamiliar retelling of a practised and rehearsed story, and a subsequent shift in identity and a greater understanding, for the characters concerned, of how they each became the way they are. What does not survive for the characters affected in these two plays is their established (fixed, anchored) identification with a massively constricting and limiting personal story. It is in this sense that I understand McLean-Hopkins' reference to Bobby Baker's 'strategies for survival' - that is, that the process of devising has the potential for the artist to release themselves from the grip of unwanted narratives.

Stephenson is also the editor of a collection of essays *Solo Performances - Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* Volume Twenty (2010). In the introduction, Stephenson points to the 'dynamic and profoundly effective interplay between a single performer and the witnessing audience community' (2010: viii) and she cites Knowles and Lane who consider that, in Canada, 'some of our most provocative theatre experiences have resulted from the encounter between audiences and the solo actor' (in Stephenson, 2010: viii). She notes that when the performer performs in public, the audience also has the opportunity to touch their own sense of authenticity (2010: viii).

In an essay in this volume, Ann Wilson explores the audience's engagement with solo 'auto-performances'. She argues that 'the power of these plays rests on their very confessional nature' and that '[w]hat is at stake in auto-performance often seems to be the sense of personal authenticity', much as it is in psychotherapy (2010: 38-39). She cites Herbert Blau, who considered the similarities and differences between the processes of psychoanalysis and theatre and suggests that within the process of theatre rehearsal - '[r]ehearsal is reflection. Reflection is rehearsal' (in Wilson, 2010: 39). However, she suggests that '*what is decidedly different about theatre is that it is public. The confession takes place before an audience which has more than one person*' (2010: 39, my emphasis).

In *Theatre and AutoBiography - Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice* (Grace and Wasserman, 2006), co-editor Sherrill Grace writes

at their best, auto/biographical plays are profoundly philosophical; they probe and weigh what it means to claim a personal or national identity... They challenge the social construction of identity by staging processes of identity formation that invite audiences to see themselves and others as able to recreate identity and to reassert personal agency. At their best, these plays use the facts of a personal story to make us rethink the concept of self and the relationship of self to others. (2006: 15)

Like others previously mentioned in this literature review, Grace too considers memory and story as the basic tools underlying autobiography. She believes that narratives create context and organise our meaning making; that it is through story that we discover what we believe to be true about ourselves and others (2006: 15).

In her chapter in *Theatre and Autobiography*, Susan Bennett begins by citing Paul John Eakin: 'The self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure' (in Bennet, 2006: 33). This raises once again the question of whose narrative is being revealed and organised. Bennett argues that when the subject of the autobiographical

performance and the body of the performer coincide, the audience experiences a strong sense of authenticity despite being confronted by the question 'what here is real?' She illustrates effectively how unsettling and troublesome this question is with examples of work by Spalding Gray, Karen Finley and Adrienne Kennedy (2006: 33-46). In a later chapter, performer and director Joy Coghill neatly summarises this perspective (and captures the meaning of the slash in auto/biography) when she writes

The interesting thing about biography / autobiography and writing plays is that it is all, surely, autobiography. Because even as you take the breath, as the pen goes down on the yellow lined paper, you know what this character has to say. But it gets swirled around in the air somehow and when it gets down on the page, whether it is Millie or Freda or Small, it's actually my understanding in that moment of her life and my own. (2006: 316)

In the same volume, Guillermo Verdecchia reflects that for him all writing draws at least to some extent on his own experiences and the theatre is the site where the performer can resist the way official versions of events and truths are constructed (2006: 335).

Misri Dey's *Making Solo Performance* (2018) is based on interviews with six practitioners - Bryony Kimmings, Tim Etchells, Bobby Baker, Mike Pearson, Wendy Houston and Nigel Charnock - all of whom relate to their work as auto/biographical. However, rather than focusing on the theoretical aspects of auto/biography and auto/biographical performance, the book explores the practical elements of devising a solo performance. Dey points out that the term devising had been reserved for group processes that emphasise shared ownership and authorship rather than on a single voice and was associated with a move in the arts away from a repressive UK political culture (2018: 115). The six interviewees discuss details of their praxis, and how they make solo work and Dey states that these

practitioners 'make, perform and balance at least three roles: deviser, director and performer. Dey describes Kimmings as 'provocatively autobiographical' (2018: 8).

Kimmings tells Dey that 'All I felt like I had the confidence to talk about was my own life. This is the work I enjoy - people talking about their lives' (Kimmings in Dey, 2018: 20). Etchells talks about 'putting himself on the map' in a performance (Etchells in Dey, 2018: 56) and quite consciously showing multiple different, even contradictory, versions of himself. He tells Dey that 'It's not about revealing the true version; it's much more about showing some things in between the cracks out of which I might appear' (Etchells in Dey, 2018: 82). Baker says 'It all comes back to - well I only know this from my point of view. So, that's just the way I am' (Baker in Dey, 2018: 100), adding that 'Autobiographical work is seen as lacking a status and yet it is where new ideas and new forms come from' (Baker in Dey, 2018: 101). Pearson describes how unfamiliar autobiographical work was when he made his first piece, *From Memory*, in 1992, but how he wanted to include personal things and personal experiences, and that he discovered that autobiographical material could be opened out to have resonance for the audience (Pearson in Dey, 2018: 134). Similarly, Houstoun explains that when autobiographical material is not presented as a linked-up story, 'the audience starts making the joins instead' (Houstoun in Dey, 2018: 161). Charnock states quite simply: 'It's always personal, always autobiographical, always therapy' (Charnock in Dey, 2018: 194).

Susana Pendzik, Renée Emunah and David Read Johnson's book, *The Self in Performance: Autobiographical, Self-Revelatory, and Autoethnographic Forms of Therapeutic Theatre* (2016), picks up directly on this therapeutic aspect of solo performance. It primarily focuses on dramatherapy and perhaps relates more closely to my own research and practice of Solo Autobiographical Theatre, as it explicitly explores how and why 'something powerful and healing occurs when a person creates a performance based on their life' (Pendzik et al.,



2016: v). However, detailed reading clarifies certain central differences. The editors, all experienced practitioners and academics, write in the preface that they at first assumed that they shared the same definitions and/or understandings of the terms *therapeutic autobiographical, self-revelatory, and ethnographic performance* (Pendzik et al., 2016: v). However, when they met to discuss the project, they concluded that there was a 'lack of clarity about the concepts, boundaries, and practices of the self in performance' (Pendzik et al., 2016: v). This realization led to the discovery that in fact 'an entirely unique branch of drama therapy performance has been developing over the past thirty years' (Pendzik et al., 2016: v). They have come to call this branch, and the different approaches it includes, *Therapeutic Autobiographical Theatre*. The book therefore examines the history, concepts, development and applications of these approaches and, within this, there is a particular focus on Emunah's *Self-Revelatory Performance*. Emunah's method of self revelatory performance 'involves the creation of an original theatrical piece based on current personal issues in need of investigation, healing or transformation' of which the central component is the 'working through of personal material' (Emunah, 2016: 37). She states that *Self-Revelatory* performers 'ideally possess a background in theatre performance' (2016: 38) and directors typically have 'strong clinical skills' (2016: 38). To be clear, *working through* draws its place in dramatherapy from the psycho-dynamic theories of psychologist Sigmund Freud (1984 [1914]: 88) and is related to the role of the patient in psychoanalysis. My research project, on the other hand, is not clinical and does not involve treatment or healing a patient. It draws on transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), maps of narrative practice (Epston and White, 1992; White, 2007), and ontological inquiry (Hyde and Kopp, 2019: 10), all of which are predicated on a different set of presuppositions.

Snow's chapter in this collection traces the history and influences on Autobiographical Therapeutic Theatre, from Stanislavski and Moreno, through Artaud, Grotowski, The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, The Performance Group and Spalding Gray (2016: 21). This is helpful in reasserting the wider context in which Pendzik and her colleagues' research has taken place. Moreover, in the editors' jointly written opening chapter, 'The Self in Performance: Context, Definitions, Directions', they ask a question that is wholly pertinent to my own research: 'when does telling one's story have a liberating effect, and when does it become merely a recounting of one's misery and victimization?' (2016: 2) They answer their own question with an observation from the psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft who 'emphasizes the need for therapeutic autobiography to involve a reflexive practice that aims at self-discovery' (2016: 2). Rycroft states that 'In a true therapeutic process a dialectic takes place between present "I" and past "me", at the end of which both have changed and the author-subject could say equally truthfully, "I wrote it" and "it wrote me"' (Pendzik et al., 2016: 2).

#### **0.14 Positioning the Written Element of this Thesis**

This project is auto/biographical. I wrote it, and in concert it wrote me. I write about myself, my own experience and my relationships with others. A vital part of my auto/biography is growing up in the Jewish tradition. Throughout the thesis, the reader may discern my Jewish sensibility in my artistic choices and decisions. The project is also ontological; throughout the processes of research, of devising and of performing, I am challenging myself, my ways of being, my faith, my assumptions and beliefs. The philosopher Martin Heidegger describes human beings' existence as '*thrown*' to the world (1962: 264). By *thrownness* he means that every person is born into specific culture and a particular family,

at a distinct moment of human history and inherits what philosopher William Large calls a 'weight of tradition' (2008: 58). I was *thrown* to being Jewish, to being dual national, Israeli-British, and to being a teenager in the 1960s. *Thrownness*, one's inherited cultural background shapes and forms a person's choices and decisions. It also frames the range of possibilities for living that appear to be available (Large, 2008: 58). My own *thrownness* is inter-woven in the choices that determine the triple loop of *Know-What*, *Know-That* and *Know-How* throughout the written thesis.

To 'thicken' this weave, throughout the thesis the reader will come across a number of passages where I have made use of more explicitly auto/biographical, reflective writing in order to fully articulate the range of emotions and experiences that have influenced this project. Allsop has suggested that 'performance writing also provides a means for rethinking and understanding a range of arts and performance practices that have remained silent or mute in the face of more traditional ways of looking and reading' (1999: 77). Bolton states that reflective writing allows the writer to 'explore the gaps when we cannot find an answer' (2010: xiv). Accordingly, I have included auto/biographical writing that layers the thesis and expresses moments of inner experience - sometimes of confusion or uncertainty, other times of great clarity. These passages attempt to illustrate and illuminate both personal, ineffable experiences, and the movement between them and the research process itself. I use this writing to weave the connection between me and my research process. Often, I draw on them to convey to the reader instances when my experience includes what I refer to as *inner-most*; those most intimate events, which elude language and disappear upon being voiced. These passages are differentiated by the *use of italics and colour*.

In a similar vein, Jordan writes that 'footnotes are not an addition to the text, but an equal partner' (2006: 2), he describes them as 'walking guides' (2006: 2). In this thesis too,

footnotes often act in direct conjunction with the text, these include (but are not limited to) explications, and (employing performer Ken Campbell's term) 'supposings' (Coveney, 2011: 251) - that is, considerations of possibilities, alternatives or options, and are often also written in an auto/biographical voice.

Robin Nelson suggests that within PaR there is an awareness that new knowledges and insights are always

[..] situated: depending on where you enter, or pause to reflect upon findings, the insights will differ, but this is seen not as a weakness of the model, rather a recognition that knowing is processual and a matter of multiple perspectives' (2013: 53).

He states that 'hermeneutic-interpretative models are not linear but figured as circles, *spirals* or networks with many points of entry' (2013: 53, my emphasis). This research project has unquestionably felt *spiral* in its nature. I have returned frequently to familiar territory; towards the end of the research process, I wrote in my reflective journal:

*Looking back now, across the years - having played the part of both the researcher and the research subject - both inextricably intertwined - being both the person generating experiences - and the person making-sense of those experiences - entering into an ongoing, curling dialogue with myself - I have returned, over and again - all-be-it gladly - to the same locations - to the same themes, the same issues and concerns - whereupon each return has been like climbing spiral stairs, cased within a lighthouse, looking out of the narrow windows - each return has revealed the outer landscape from a different angle - each return disclosing something new. Something new that is not only **out there** but is **in me** and with every return becomes even more spacious, more allowing, more releasing.* (Reflective Journal, 2021)

Additionally, it is important to note that all through the thesis I have included quotes that are in their original form. They do not necessarily use inclusive language. I acknowledge that exclusive language is no longer acceptable and while I am not changing it, I would like the reader to know that when I use these quotes I am

assuming that, for instance, by ‘men’, they mean *all people* unless I explicitly note otherwise.

In addition to the written element of the thesis, outlined below, I include a thesis performance, which I write about in detail in Chapter Five, and which forms an integral part of this exploration as a parallel voice and a second description of the practice as research. The link to the private YouTube channel where the two evenings of the thesis performance can be viewed is

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2lhNQu-qYI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbn5o3x-bCo>. It may also be found again at the beginning of the script in Appendix Eight. The full script of this performance can also be found in Appendix Eight.

## **0.15 Thesis Outline**

Chapter One introduces the principal influencers whose ideas underpin and inform my mindset and perspectives regarding my approach to the concept of transformation in this research and thesis: Werner Erhard and Jerzy Grotowski. I detail the stages and development of both of their careers and approaches. I illustrate the overlap between the work and thinking of Erhard and the philosopher Martin Heidegger, and I outline Erhard’s original self-transformation programme, the *est* training. I explore Grotowski’s enduring commitment to freedom and his unique approach to self-transformation.

However, it is important to note that I entered into the doctoral research process with a far deeper understanding of the *est* training and Werner Erhard’s work, than of theatre and performance, as theoretical underpinnings for personal transformation. These were

important catalysts for the research inquiry. As the research progressed Erhard played an invaluable role as a 'bridge' to my growing appreciation of Grotowski's practices. At the beginning of the project I had been participating in Erhard's work intimately for over thirty years since 1982. I only encountered the work of Jerzy Grotowski, in any meaningful way, late in 2016 and 2017 during my early research into theatre theorists and practitioners who were exploring self-transformation. Thus, as my experience in theatre grew, and my commitment to performing deepened, during the research process, Erhard's influence on my practice began to shrink, while Grotowski's continued to expand, informing both my thinking and my performances. In relation to my research question, this was true in particular regarding Grotowski's attitude toward self-transformation and the actor 'who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself - the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world' (Grotowski, 2002 [1968]: 35). Readers will notice this shift in emphasis as they continue to read through the thesis and Erhard becomes less prominent in the writing and has a less prominent role in my thinking.

In Chapter Two, I offer a brief practitioner review that delineates the approaches to stories and storytelling of a selection of writers and performers, and establishes story as a vital component to self-transformation. It explains how and why I chose these particular practitioners. The chapter also explains the role of story in my own practice of Solo auto/biographical theatre, and describes two pieces of work I made at the beginning of the research process, *1966* and *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump*.

Chapter Three is about the intersection of place, audience and encounter. I analyse the importance that place has on the construction of identity, and in particular of my own identity. The chapter explores a performance I made in Israel in which I begin to discover a state, or way of being, in performance that I refer to as 'beyond technique'. It starts to

investigate the possibility that there is a structured development of skill and technique that can lead to or give access to this state, which is connected to a process of transformation. I also consider philosopher Martin Buber's concept of the *I-Thou* encounter and the meeting that can take place between solo auto/biographical performer and audience.

In Chapter Four, I discuss issues of self and persona, presence, authenticity and possibility in the context of the performance I made after my return from Israel. In this chapter I draw in particular on the work of Ken Campbell and Spalding Gray in order to illustrate how my practice was developing, how I was learning to use the skills they depicted, and how I was incorporating their ideas and approaches to performing solo.

Finally, Chapter Five considers the on-line thesis performance I made as the culmination of the research project. It describes the various iterations of the performance and how it evolved. The chapter also explains how I used an analysis of the work of another contemporary solo auto/biographical performer to understand the transformational facets of solo auto/biographical theatre more deeply. It uses the thesis performance to reflect upon and analyse the state of 'beyond technique' and its connection to encounter and self-transformation.

## CHAPTER ONE - GROUNDING FIELDS OF INFLUENCE

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I create a context for my research and map out the two principal frames of reference which underpin and inform my practice of solo auto/biographical theatre. I discuss the work and thinking of two innovators, Werner Erhard and Jerzy Grotowski, who have each, in their own but different ways, provided frameworks for personal or self-transformation. The work and thinking of these two interlocutors constitute primary, personal, perceptual filters through which I make sense of and experience the research I undertook and my activity as a practitioner of solo auto/biographical theatre. Perceptual filtering is described as 'the process of taking in new information and interpreting it according to prior experiences and cultural norms' (Perceptual Filtering, 2010: 537). In other words, their two fields - the theatre and research of Jerzy Grotowski, and Erhard's work in personal transformation and ontological inquiry - come together in this project as grounding influences for my own research and practice. By influence, I mean that they have had the capacity or power to produce a visible or noticeable effect on the choices and actions I make throughout the research and the fluency and flow of the process.

There are three features that these influencers share. First, they have each refined, developed and advanced their work in stages; their ideas took shape over many years. Second, each of these approaches - Grotowski's theatre, Erhard's transformational trainings - is committed to personal transformation; that is, to people experiencing themselves with the fullest possible sense of personal agency, free to choose their responses and attitudes in



any given situation. Finally, they have each created a new paradigm in an established field: Grotowski in theatre, Erhard in Human Potential.

A paradigm shift is a concept that was first identified by the American physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn (2012 [1962]). It originally referred to a fundamental change in the basic concepts and experimental practices of a scientific discipline. While Kuhn restricted the use of the term to the natural sciences, the concept of a paradigm shift has since been widely applied in numerous non-scientific contexts to describe a profound change in any fundamental model; this includes a fundamental change in personal beliefs, replacing former ways of thinking or organizing with a radically different way of operating, or an entirely new perception of events or circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

The scope of this research project does not extend to a detailed analysis of all the individual exercises or activities that each included in their training programmes or interventions. Therefore, there is a specific focus in this chapter on the thinking and underlying approaches that apply and relate to personal or self-transformation.

## **1.2 Werner Erhard and the est Training**

At an event in 1980, delivered to nearly 60,000 people who had come together to begin a conversation about creating a world that works for everyone, the speaker, Werner Erhard stresses that '[t]he way each of us answers the question, what is my life really going to be about, can literally alter the course of humanity' (1980: unpaginated). Erhard's question reflected his deep and ongoing commitment to 'bringing forth a breakthrough in the possibility of being human' (1982a: unpaginated). Werner Erhard is the recognised founder

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Kuhn's practice as a 'historian of science' see Ian Hacking's introductory essay to the 50th anniversary edition of Kuhn's book (2012 [1962]: vii)

and creator of the personal transformation programme called *est*. Philosopher William Bartley III states that *est*

has a larger revolutionary goal: to create the conditions - the space, the context - in the larger environment to foster transformation at each level: individual, family-relational, organizational-institutional, and cultural-societal. (1978: 216)

*est* (always written in lower case, italic letters) was 'a training programme in the expansion and transformation of consciousness' (Bartley, 1978: xiv). It was initiated in 1971 and continued until early 1985. Ostensibly, this makes *est* one of the first and longest enduring seminars of the Human Potential Movement. However, Jonathan Moreno says:

Erhard told me that he doesn't consider himself to have been part of the human potential movement, but he agrees that his concept of the training was part of the confluence of ideas that emerged during that period. In many ways the training was the most important cultural event after the human potential movement itself seemed exhausted. (Moreno, n.d.: unpaginated)

Erhard did not consider *est* as another of the large group sensitivity trainings or encounter groups that were prevalent at the time. He states that '[t]he real purpose of *est* was to create space for people to participate in life - to experience true space and freedom in life' (n.d.: unpaginated). He argued that all those offer people what he calls content - that is, techniques, ideas or information to learn or remember in order to change. However, for Erhard transformation is not change. He states:

Therapy is concerned with changes - with fixing up and making better. *est* is concerned with transformation. This is not merely semantics - there is a real and crucial difference. Change is substituting one thing for another thing. Transformation is a fundamental alteration of the context in which one holds or observes everything. *est* is concerned with context; therapy is concerned with content. *est* is concerned with transforming the context in which one views and experiences everything in life. *est* does not change what one knows; it transforms the way in which one knows. (1977: unpaginated)

*est* is the Latin word for 'it is' or 'what is' and is a recognition of one of the core concepts of the training - the ability to accept life exactly as it is, and even more critically as it is not, or as we wish it should be. It is also the acronym for the Erhard Standard Training or Erhard Seminars Training.

A cornerstone of transformation in *est* is the profound confrontation with self: the experience of not simply understanding, but experiencing, your own life, including self and identity, from an entirely original, unanticipated and distinct angle, dissimilar to any other. The training brings about an experience in which the participants transcend personality (Erhard and Fadiman, 1977: unpaginated). This experience, which includes freeing oneself from the past, is accomplished by facing down recurring patterns of thinking and acting, and confronting problems rather than avoiding or ignoring them. From Erhard's perspective eschewing issues only leads to repeating and/or putting up with them indefinitely. A typical *est* idiom of the time expresses this position as 'what you resist - persists'. Allowing themselves to experience the pointlessness and the futility of holding on to old, burdensome positions or behaviours, trainees are able to 'experience them out' (Moreno, 2014: 245). Confronting and experiencing, as it is used in *est*, means to bring complete attention and awareness to any lived experience, without a pre-conceived attitude, evaluation, judgement or belief. It implies seeing the thing fully as it is, and as it is not. It means to meet it, acknowledge it, enter it and encounter it, rather than resist, deny, or disavow it. It entails owning it or embracing it, rather than attempting to disown it or distance oneself from it. Ultimately it means simply allowing it to be.

The first *est* training was delivered by Erhard in San Francisco in October 1971. By 1980, it is estimated that up to a quarter of a million people had already taken the *est* training

(Bartley, 1978: xiv).<sup>11</sup> From that time forward, Erhard's core programmes went through a series of phases: the *est* training (1971-1985), The Forum (1984-1991), and The Landmark Forum (1991 - present). While I have participated in all of these stages and many of the other courses, seminars and programmes grounded in Erhard's work, in this research I am choosing to focus primarily on my participation in the *est* training, as this was a) my originating experience of personal or self-transformation, b) my most profound awakening experience, and c) the event that is most relevant to this thesis and research project. Moreover, despite the development over forty years of Erhard's programmes, Bruce Hyde and Drew Kopp maintain that 'from the first offering of the *est* training in 1971 through its replacement by The Forum in 1985 and its current iteration as The Landmark Forum' the underlying pedagogical methodology remains fundamentally the same (2019: 3), and it is reasonable to consider *est* and its successor programmes as the same, even if they are not identical.

In my experience, the *est* training was an extended, rigorous, experiential guided epistemological inquiry led by the *est* trainer. It consisted of:

- i. The presentation of ideas by the trainer for consideration, reflection and discussion
- ii. Personal sharing by the participants, who were free to contribute or not, to illustrate existing positions, perspectives, beliefs, experiences and points of view<sup>12</sup>
- iii. Sensory based guided processes, led by the trainer, including visualisations, and other exercises that were designed to illuminate emotions, meaning,

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<sup>11</sup> 'Take the training' was the vernacular for the experience of participating. Take can mean many things e.g., to put oneself into as in - take the sun, or enter into as in - take a job, or adopt as one's own as in - take a stand, or perform as in - take aim, or to feel or experience as in - take offense. To take the *est* training suggested all these.

<sup>12</sup> Sharing in the *est* training included publicly disclosing personal experiences, offering opinions, challenging assumptions, voicing disagreement, articulating discomfort and expressing emotions.

beliefs, communication patterns or habitual thinking (any of which would be familiar in many actor training programmes)

- iv. Assignments that were to be completed outside the training room and included conversations or interviews with others, letter writing or other creative writing.

No note taking was allowed in the training room. The content of the *est* training was not intended as information to be remembered or data to be learned. It was simply one part of an elaborate, overall process designed to bring about or cause the previously mentioned 'alteration of the context in which one holds or observes everything' (Erhard, 1977b: unpaginated). To undergo the *est* training was to undergo a paradigmatic shift into an, apparently, entirely new paradigm conceived of and developed by Werner Erhard and transmitted by Erhard and the *est* trainers he trained.

My understanding and experience of the *est* training was that it was designed to bring about an epistemological break with the trainees' previous thinking. Certainly, by the end of the training, I felt as if my thinking had rotated through 180 degrees. What I am describing here as a rotation, Erhard distinguishes as follows:

a breakthrough occurs in which a person is no longer automatically displaced by the *lack of distinction* between self and mind [...] The Training does not dismiss, suppress or alter the mind. It allows people to *distinguish* the mind - to see it for what it is and isn't. In distinguishing the mind, in becoming aware of it as the mind, so to speak, the 'ghost,' the 'superstition' of the mind loses its hold as a phenomenon of interference. One's mind becomes a useful tool: it is the same as it always was, except now there is *the distinction*, "you", and the distinction, "mind". One leaves the Training having a mind, not being a mind [...] Just bringing forth such a distinction, by the way, is all that is necessary to accomplish the outcome. One needn't change the mind, alter it, suppress it, or manipulate it. Each of us has the capacity to create abstractly, to create distinctions. Most of us have let the ability atrophy. In the Training, our ability to look at things abstractly is rehabilitated. (in Bodek 1984: unpaginated, my emphasis)

The phenomena that were presented during the training, included (but were not limited to): being, meaning, authenticity, enslavement by the past, and possibility. Bartley describes the *est* training as a ‘new form of participatory theatre that incorporates Socratic method’ (1978: 198) and he compares the irreverent nature of the training to the comedic performances of Lenny Bruce (1978: xx).<sup>13</sup> Luke Rhinehart also describes the *est* training as a form of living theatre (1977: 12), and the dramatic monologue developed for the trainer by Erhard, as theatrical. Psychotherapist Adelaide Bry called the *est* trainers brilliant actors who are ‘stern and unbending, sometimes clowning and funny, at others, beautiful, polished, clever’ (1976: 163).

### 1.3 Werner Erhard, *est*, and Martin Heidegger

Hyde and Kopp claim that ‘the work of Werner Erhard is aligned in significant ways with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger’ (2019: 8). Heidegger’s primary concern throughout his career was with the meaning of Being (Wheeler, 2011: unpaginated). His magnum opus *Being and Time*, first published in 1927, is generally regarded as one of the most important texts in the canon of 20th century Continental Philosophy. It has been noted that even though the beginning of *est* predates Erhard’s encounter with Heidegger circa. 1980, it was already aligned in significant ways with Heidegger’s thinking (Dreyfus, n.d.: unpaginated; Hyde and Kopp, 2019: 3). Similarly, the philosopher Michael Zimmerman reports that

I took the *est* training in December of 1980. It was an amazing experience. I had a powerful breakthrough and insight. I got it, as they say in the jargon. And

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<sup>13</sup> Solo auto/biographical theatre may find many of its roots in the radicalism of the 1960s which would include some of the ground-breaking performances in comedy as well as theatre and art. For example, on the official website of Lenny Bruce, Albert Goldman described Bruce’s performance at the Carnegie Hall in 1961 as follows: ‘Sending, sending, sending, he would finally reach a point of clairvoyance where he was no longer a performer but rather a medium transmitting messages that just came to him from out there—from recall, fantasy, prophecy. A point at which, like the practitioners of automatic writing, his tongue would outrun his mind and he would be saying things he didn’t plan to say, things that surprised, delighted him, cracked him up—as if he were a spectator at his own performance!’ (Goldman, n.d.: unpaginated)

what I got was that I was an openness, a clearing. This is so powerful in part because I was a student of Heidegger, in the sense that I read his books and had written a book about him and so on. I saw that this was so consistent with Heidegger's idea of what it means to be human, that I was totally amazed. In addition to that, I find this transformational workshop [...] is able to generate *a first-person experience of my being this nothingness*, this openness. It was astounding to me. (n.d.: unpaginated, my emphasis)

Hyde and Kopp argue that for both Erhard and Heidegger, the goal of their inquiries is 'never an answer but the opening of a question from which to experience the world' (2019: 15). However, they explain that notwithstanding the similarities between Erhard and Heidegger's inquiries into Being there is nevertheless a fundamental difference in the way they approach the subject. They state that 'this difference lies in the *rhetorical form* of their communication' (2019: 127, italics in the original), and that even though Heidegger was 'committed to a transformation of his students' thinking about Being, he did not engage them as individuals in a dialogue about the possibility of this transformation in their own lives - that is, in their own Being-in-the-world' (2019: 129). Erhard, on the other hand, engages directly in a rhetorical dialogue with the participants in which the specific and declared aim is for each individual to experience a sudden, total gestalt moment of unconcealment. I am using unconcealment here in the Heideggerian sense of a moment of freedom: 'what is opened up in an open region, lets beings be the beings they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be' (Heidegger, 1998a [1930]: 144). In *est*, this moment of unconcealment is a moment of realising what is possible in-the-world and as such becomes an accessible feature of everyday living: transformation as a way of being.

Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus explains that the training is an approach to hermeneutic phenomenology, a method first proposed by Heidegger and much later honed by *est*, which enables the trainees to get behind the concepts and everyday interpretations of experience 'to a direct manifestation of Being itself' (n.d.: 3).

William Large clarifies that Heidegger's Dasein (Being) is Nothing (2008: 71). Being is a space, or as stated earlier, Being is what Heidegger refers to as a *clearing*. Heidegger writes that

In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing. Thought of in reference to beings, this clearing is more in being than are beings. This open centre is therefore not surrounded by beings; rather, the clearing centre itself encircles all that is, as does the nothing, which we scarcely know. (Heidegger, 2001 [1975]: 51)

Heidegger argues that Human Being generally does not differentiate its own thinking from the realm of thinking it has unawaredly inherited. Therefore, he asserts, in its quotidian existence Human Being is always lacking its own ground to stand on. Ground here means an origin or source of self that is not derived from any public discourse, which Heidegger refers to as *idle talk* (1962: 211) or anyone else, whom Heidegger calls The They (Large, 2008: 53). This missing source is a ground of one's own. It is a phenomenon that grounds self, while it itself is not grounded by anything else. Heidegger sometimes calls this missing ground the Nothing (1962: 231) or at other times The Clearing (1962: 171). This fundamental way of being is precisely what makes possibility possible, as he states (twice, emphatically): 'Ground has its non-essence because it springs from finite freedom [...] Freedom is the ground of ground' (Heidegger, 1998 [1967]: 134). The singular experience of *est* is the moment of discovery that at the heart of each of our own existence is nothing. The participant in *est* discovers, through direct, lived experience, 'that space within yourself where such moments originate, actually where you and life originate' (Erhard and Gioscia, 1977: unpaginated).

Erhard has stated that '[p]roperly speaking, *est* is not an epistemology, since epistemologies are ordinarily defined as ways of understanding the contents of experience, and *est* is not about understanding the contents of experience; it is about the source or generation of experience' (Erhard and Gioscia 1977: unpaginated). In Erhard's world view, the moment of transformation



is not an event. It doesn't have the properties of things or experiences. It has no position, no location in time, no beginning, no middle, and no end. It doesn't look like anything or feel like anything. (Erhard and Gioscia 1976: unpaginated)

There are certain experiences that cannot be described in words. More recently instances of these experiences have become known as quales or qualia. Daniel Dennett identifies four properties that are commonly ascribed to qualia (in Whalley and Miller, 2017: 80). Paraphrasing Dennett, qualia are:

- Ineffable - that is, they cannot be comprehended by any other means than direct experience. They cannot be communicated literally, nor can they be transferred to another.
- Phenomenological - they can only be encountered (caught) by direct experience.
- Intrinsic - that is, they do not change depending on the experience's relation to other events or circumstances, feelings or emotions.
- Private - that is, they are impossible to compare to other experiences, even other qualic experiences.
- Whole and complete - that is, to experience a quale is to know one experiences a quale, and to know all there is to know about that quale, in the moment of the qualic experience.

Whalley and Miller cite Tye who calls the distance between the experience itself and the description of the experience 'a gap in the world' (2017: 80). They ask whether qualia are the tip of the iceberg in terms of our understanding of as-yet-undefined states of mind. In this thesis, I am suggesting that the gap in the world is a shift in consciousness and a concomitant way-of-being in the world, and that participants of *est* discover that it is possible to live life from this gap.

For Erhard, *est* provides no content; rather, it catalyses the direct experiencing of a (meta) context which encompasses all the other contexts within which human beings exist. In my own understanding, this is the very clearing Heidegger describes, and the *est* training provides its graduates the opportunity to live their life from and as that clearing. *est* graduate Luke Rhinehart reports that ‘Werner himself has said in one interview that what [the graduates] *get* is an experience of enlightenment’ (1977: 197, my emphasis). To get can mean to experience (I suddenly got a pain in my eye) or to receive (I just got a parcel in the mail) or to succeed in achieving (I finally got enough sleep last night). ‘Getting it’ in *est* included all these.<sup>14</sup>

The Chilean biologist, philosopher and cybernetics theoretician Humberto Maturana wrote a commissioned report about the *est* training in which he describes the experience of getting it as follows:

The training culminates in a mood of amorality (mutual respect without value judgement) in which nothing matters outside the experience in the present, with experiential, actual or potential, disillusion of the ego through the experience that *anything that is, is*, as well as a mood of liberation of a burden through the disappearance of value judgement as a feature of the experience in the present. (Maturana 1982: 2, my emphasis)

Similarly, Zimmerman reports that

getting it is not a matter of improvement or getting better, but instead involves a radical shift that transcends the distinction between better and worse. *Getting it means realising that I and the Other are one*, not separate. (1982: 7, my emphasis)

Zimmerman’s description echoes a much later revelatory experience of my own that occurred when I was devising my first solo performance, *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* in 2011 (discussed

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<sup>14</sup> I speak about my own personal experience of ‘getting it’ in my thesis performance (See Appendix Eight for the full script).

more fully in Chapter Two). While I was pondering how to include the intractability of the Israel-Palestine disputes in the performance, I wrote the following passage for my script:

*Today I am the universe; I am the soldier and the child; I am the land and the divide; I am the bullet and the blood; I am the friend and the enemy ... I am the everyman .... And I knew in every fibre of my being that I and the Other are one and not separate.* (2011, emphasis in the original)

It was at this moment that *est* and solo auto/biographical theatre coincided within me for the first time. The experience of making and performing *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* rekindled, both for me and in me, the earlier *est* experience of there being no other, of being nothing, of coming from nothing, and consequently of living life from nothing. This led directly to seeking out theatrical thinking and practice that could offer something similar to *est*. The intention of this research project is to discover, specifically, how this kind of transformational event can be transferred to the performer through solo auto/biographical theatre.

#### **1.4 Jerzy Grotowski: The Man and his Work**

Like Werner Erhard, Jerzy Grotowski (b. 1933 d. 1999) was also committed to making a difference at a scale beyond individual change. After Robert Findlay participated in the premiere of Grotowski's paratheatrical event called *Tree of People*, in Wroctaw, Poland, in January 1979, he perceptively posed the question 'Has Grotowski simply opened the Polish Branch of the Esalen Institute or become the Werner Erhard of Wroclaw?' (Findlay 1980: 353). Indeed, Grotowski says poetically of himself:

[M]y obligation is not to make political declarations, but to make holes in the wall. The things that were forbidden before me should be permitted after me; the doors which were closed and double-locked should be opened. I must resolve the problem of freedom and tyranny through practical measures. (Grotowski 1987: 31)

For Grotowski, practical measures include 'practical work in a theatre laboratory' (2002 [1968]: 51), practical experimentation, practical investigations and practical results. Christof suggests that throughout his career, Grotowski 'believed that ritual was the means to achieve liberation' and, because he believed there is always the potential to overlap ritual and theatre, Grotowski was able to envision the possibility of engaging in a pursuit of freedom in a highly practical way through theatre (Christof 2019: 135-136).

In 1984, after claiming political asylum in the USA, Grotowski stated that working under the strict communist regime and Polish martial law meant, 'I had to say I was not political in order to be political' (in Findlay 2001: 180). Indeed, Kris Salata suggests that what Grotowski was unable to say overtly, under the politically repressive regime in Poland of the time, was that 'the theatrical encounter in its most radical form becomes a *transformative human deed*, that deep performer's work challenges societal beliefs and practices and that it can be radically illuminating and liberating' (Salata 2013: 171, my emphasis).

Throughout Grotowski's career, three core principles underpinned his work, his approach and his philosophy of theatre: *conjunctio oppositorum*, *via negativa* and 'total act'. *Conjunctio oppositorum* means the coincidence or the unity of opposites. Grotowski considered the actor's capacity to hold opposites as one essential condition of the art of acting. For Grotowski, it implied creating a unified whole, for example: unifying the mundane and the sacred, the audience and the performers, structure and spontaneity, 'religion expressed through blasphemy; or love speaking out through hate' (2002 [1968]: 22).

The term *via negativa* originally has theological connotations and has been used previously by theologians, particularly those with a mystical orientation, for example Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) and medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, to illustrate that God is ineffable (Maimonides, 1963).

Grotowski incorporated this terminology into his approach and sought ways for his actors to create a similar quality of ineffability for themselves (2002 [1968]: 17). *Via negativa*, the negative way, has two connotations in Grotowski's work. The first is the paring away of everything that is unnecessary for theatre to be simply an encounter between actor and spectator - reducing for example, scenery, lighting, sound, make-up, costume etc. Grotowski considered them all superfluous to creating a moment of real meeting and shared humanity between audience and performer.

The second, and perhaps more important aspect of *via negativa* in Grotowski's work is the actor's personal ability. Grotowski describes ability not as an accumulation of skills but rather the removal of all psychophysical blocks - such as embarrassment, approval or shame - so that no distance or interval occurs between the inner, immediate impulse to express something and the outer resulting action that the audience can see and respond to contiguously. He writes:

We must find out what it is that hinders him in the way of respiration, movement and - most important of all - human contact. What resistances are there? How can they be eliminated? I want to take away, steal from the actor all that disturbs him. That which is creative will remain within him. It is a liberation. (2002 [1968]: 209)

Grotowski also refers to this process of elimination and removal as 'disarming' the actor (in Fumaroli 2001: 111). This is central to the process I refer to as self-transformation and is captured in Grotowski's assertion that 'we arm ourselves in order to hide, honesty begins where we are vulnerable (in Rusek, 2013: unpaginated).

Third, for Grotowski, 'total act', implies the actor returning, through memory, to their most important personal or significant experiences which they are encouraged to re-experience repeatedly until the associated feeling or emotions are, to use Grotowski's term,

purified (Kelera, in Grotowski 2002 [1968]: 109). Grotowski describes the outcome of this process in the following way:

At the moment when the actor achieves this act, they become a *hic et nunc* phenomenon (here and now, my translation); it is neither narrative nor illusion - it is the present. They reveal themselves, the Latin word *fiat*, they present that which is happening and that which will happen; he discovers himself (in *Total Act*, 2012: unpaginated)

Tatiana Motta Lima explains that for Grotowski

memory was not seen as a reachable file to be used by the actor and director for construction of an intense scene. The memory was, instead, the possibility of escape - or extending, or relaxing - from the usual library files (and even this term 'file' is incomplete, since it is unaware of the relation of transformation happening in both ways between memory and the performer) allowing the search for the ones that are forgotten, renegade; the 'wild' files, not trained. (Motta Lima, 2012: unpaginated)

The question of discovering oneself is paramount for Grotowski. The goal of performing is for the individual to discover their purpose. Theatre is the opportunity to find oneself through a process of self-exploration and self-discovery. For example, Lendra explains how Grotowski would encourage participants in his classes not to react to what they saw or heard outside themselves but to pay attention and be aware of their thoughts, inner reactions and inner dialogue (1991: 126). Winterbottom describes a similar instruction he received from Grotowski that 'I should observe my own breath and what is happening internally. With the inhale, observe the outer world, with the exhale, the inner. Do not identify. Observe the inner as if it were the outer' (Winterbottom 1991: 142).

From the very beginning of his professional career, Grotowski had an 'expanded sense of theatre' (Schechner 2001e: 489-90). His research process however was never linear. It was not a case of this-brought-about-this; rather, he drew on a multitude of sources simultaneously, integrating, side-by-side, for example, his personal experience of Polish history, politics, culture and religion, ideas from the Russian philosopher, mystic and spiritual

teacher George Ivanovic Gurdjieff (1866 -1949), the mystical Islamic beliefs and practices of Sufism, the potential of the *I-Thou* relationship proposed by Martin Buber, the traditions and stories of the Jewish spiritual movement of *Hasidism* and the mystical writings of the Jewish Kabbalah, along with ancient shamanism and the rituals and traditions of Africa, the Caribbean, and Indonesia, the more contemporary teachings of mystic author and anthropologist Carlos Castaneda and the thinking of the Human Potential Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. All these, plus the theories of theatre directors and theorists Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, Asian drama and Indian *Kathakali* theatre, Peking (Beijing) Opera and *Noh* Theatre informed his teaching, his directing and his productions. He drew on all these fields of study and influences in an attempt to 'rediscover a ritual theatre for the West' (Richie 2001: 144). Christof describes this as 'a constant blending of the boundaries between disciplines' (2019: 129).

Schechner suggests that Grotowski 'would not use the word spiritual ... he would more probably mock the idea' (2001e: 465). Indeed, Grotowski states 'I speak only about holiness as an unbeliever. I mean a secular holiness' (2002 [1968]: 34). He states, 'It is rather a metaphor defining a person who, through his art, climbs upon the stake and performs an act of self-sacrifice' (2002 [1968]: 43). However, Christof writes that Grotowski's lexicon continually involves overtly religious language including for example, transfiguration, communion and confession (2019: 19). Grotowski spoke about performance in terms of spirit and of energy, about transforming energy and bringing 'something very high down to something very low' (in Wolford: 1996a: 113). Thomas Richards uses the metaphor of a river of energy and describes Grotowski's process of preparing actors as 'a journey from one quality of energy, dense and vital, up and up towards a very subtle quality of energy, and then that subtle something descending back into the basic physicality' (1997: 20). Grotowski's quest

was to uncover 'the depths of one's inner spiritual environment where creative silence reigns and where experience of sacrum occurs' (in Osinski, 1991: 99). In an interview in 2008, Grotowski's brother Kazimierz noted that Jerzy Grotowski's 'most ardent *modus vivendi*' was his ongoing search for God (Baumrin, 2009: 57). The theatre critic Jann Kott recounts that during an outdoor performance event held while Grotowski was working at the University of California, Irvine, a number of horses came into the view of the audience, their movements synchronising perfectly with the actors. When asked if he had orchestrated such a moment of beauty Grotowski replied that 'God is the only great director' (in Kott, 2001: 309).

The theme of liberation is central to Grotowski's life and to his approach to both theatre production and to training actors. He was fundamentally committed to freedom, for himself, for the actor, for the audience member and ultimately for humanity itself. For Grotowski, liberation is both communal and personal, and the actor is the catalyst; he states, 'If I were to build the portrait of my dreams at the very centre would be the liberated life' (in Kumiega 1987: 6). Christof points out how Grotowski would, from the very beginning of his career, push his performers

to help them break through perceived blocks: to get them to find something beyond the limitations of a subjective state of being within themselves [...] to be alive to something greater than themselves. (2019: 184)

For Grotowski, it is in this state of being that the performer is 'potentially able to create an experience of objective art in theatre' (Christof 2019: 184).

As a theatre director, theorist, researcher, and spiritual seeker, Jerzy Grotowski was undoubtedly an enigma. Schechner describes Grotowski as shadowy, 'well known and obscure simultaneously' (2001a: xxv). He writes 'he will be known only through the ripples' (2001e: 465). Slowiak and Cuesta observe that, 'He has been called a master and a charlatan,



a guru and a sage, a myth and a monster' (2007: 2). Filipowicz describes him as 'a man of the margins' (1991: 183). Even those who knew him best, and knew his work most found it hard to locate him. Welford, writing about the people who studied and trained with Grotowski the most intensively at the time said, 'there is another knowledge to which we simply do not have access [...] the people who know are not talking, at least not openly, at least not now, possibly not ever' (Welford 2001: 4). Jenna Kumiega states 'almost nothing that has been published in Grotowski's name has actually been written by him' (1987: 216); and theatre director Eugenio Barba noted 'the only thing that can be passed on is the route that one has followed' (in Welford 1996a: xxii). Schechner writes 'for more than twenty years he worked nearly in secret' (2001a: xxv) and concluded that his lineage is 'the seer-shaman [...] he belongs to an oral tradition' (2001a: xxvii-xxviii).

Schechner describes any first meeting with Grotowski as a special event and likens it to receiving a slap in the face from a zen master (2001a: xxvii). Grotowski was, he says, 'a fox, eagle, snake, mole' (2001e: 460). Film director and screenwriter Marianne Ahrne writing, in novel form, about her first encounter with Grotowski says that she knew 'that this was what she had longed for since the day she was born' (2009: 7). Lisa Welford writes that after merely reading Grotowski's paper *Holiday*, she felt a shock of recognition 'Everything in me opened toward this human being I had never met' (1996a: xvii), so much so that she then travelled thousands of miles to find the author. Thomas Richards, after studying acting with Ryszard Cieślak, one of Grotowski's key collaborators writes, 'as soon as Cieślak left my university I thought, I have to find Grotowski!' (Richards, 1995: 17). Both found him and went on to work intensively alongside him. Indeed, Richards is considered Grotowski's designated heir (Richards 1995: unpaginated).

Grotowski's key questions, to actors, to performers and to others who engaged with him were always challenging, and constantly resurfacing. In his series of talks referred to as *Holiday*, Grotowski asks 'What do you want to do with your life; do you want to hide or to reveal yourself?' (2001 [1973]: 218). In the talks called *Performer*, his challenge is: 'This life you are living, is it enough? What is your process, are you faithful to it or do you fight it? What is the quality of submission to your own destiny?' (2001 [1973]: 377). It is precisely these kinds of questions that my PhD research grapples with, as a possibility for the solo auto/biographical performer, to discover for themselves, as Grotowski puts it, 'what is most essential in life' (2001 [1973]: 220).

Grotowski viewed art as a platform for personal liberation. He believed that art allows us to 'cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness - fulfil ourselves' (2002 [1968]: 21). He states that his lifelong quest was to discover what it means 'to build a life without a lie' (2001 [1973]: 216).

### **1.5 The Stages of Grotowski's Career**

In this section, I briefly describe the stages of research that Grotowski covered during the span of more than thirty years. Wolford suggests that while each of Grotowski's stages seems to have its own distinct approach, '[f]rom the earliest phases of his research, throughout each of his various forms and manifestations, Grotowski's investigations have been motivated by certain elusive but strangely consistent desires: a longing for communion and for the possibility of *lasting transformation* of the actor/doer as human being' (Wolford 2001: 8, my emphasis).

### 1.5.1 Stage 1: Theatre of Productions - Poor Theatre 1959 - 1969

In 1959, Grotowski became the artistic director of the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole, Poland. The theatre and the company moved to Wrocław, Poland in 1965 where it operated as *Teatr Laboratorium*. These ten years were the period during which Grotowski was creating public theatre performances and his research inquiries were 'detailed investigations of the actor-audience relationship' (Grotowski 2002 [1968]: 15). In this phase, Grotowski was seeking to create a theatre of "'live" communion' (2002: 19), that is a direct, unmediated connection between the actors and the audience. This search included invoking the spiritual and the sacred through performance, in which the spirit is expressed via the actor through their body.<sup>15</sup> Grotowski's ambition was to cultivate what he called 'holy actor', yet he made clear that he was evoking a secular holiness which he insisted was not a religious calling. Theatre director and theorist Peter Brook helps clarify how this secular holiness would have been understood at that particular time when he explains that some forms of theatre can be considered holy because they create places 'in which a greater reality can be found' (Brook 1968: 60). This theatre is holy because it not only presents the invisible but also offers conditions that make its perception possible (Brook 1968: 63). Brook places Grotowski's approach and his productions in this category of Holy Theatre because 'it has a place in the community and responds to a need the churches can no longer fill' (Brook 1968: 67).

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<sup>15</sup> Invocation here means to draw an invisible or spirit force into one's own body.

### 1.5.2 Stage 2: Paratheatre 1969 - 1978

Grotowski's work between 1969 and 1978 is referred to as Paratheatre (also known as The Theatre of Participation), and Schechner suggests that 'Buber's *ich und du* informs and maybe guides the paratheatrical work' (2001d: 211, italics in the original). Christof writes that 'One of the guiding and fundamental principles of Paratheatre was to encourage active participation in the creative process, in which *a transformation of the self* could be affected' (2019: 16, my emphasis). At this point in his career, Grotowski had come to believe that it was impossible for theatre to render up the kind of communion between the actor and the spectator that he was seeking. He coined the term Paratheater to describe a new form of theatre that could take place beyond the conventions of the time. This new form began to emerge in Grotowski's imagination during the devising of his production of *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* (1968) and his extensive travels in India and Central Asia in the early 1970s.

These were expeditions which he considered to be spiritual quests in search of lost truth. Schechner states that '*Apocalypsis* was a production theatre piece desiring to be a paratheatrical work' (2001d: 207), and Kolankiewicz writes of Grotowski's trip that 'it was a journey away from theatre to the roots of culture; to essential communication and perception' (1978: 1). The confluence of these two projects brought Grotowski to new understandings about the possibilities for theatre, most specifically those concerned with eliminating the distinction between actor and audience. The years of Paratheater were themselves an ongoing process moving away from traditional forms of theatricality. They abandoned traditional vocabulary, concepts, structures and conventional thinking about theatre. Kolankiewicz describes it as a period in which a new unknown sphere of creative life was being born (1978: 1).

### 1.5.3 Stage 3: Theatre of Sources 1976 - 1982

Theatre of Sources overlaps with Paratheatre and is the latter part of the period, between 1976 and 1982. Grotowski felt that, during the first period of Paratheatre, the kind of unstructured contact that occurred in randomly selected groups of people commonly remained at a superficial level with people feigning intimacy, authenticity or presence. In his talk, *The Theatre of Sources*,<sup>16</sup> Grotowski is heralding a new, less mechanistic, more organic, turn for theatre (2001 [1981]: 252-270). This is an intensive period of research, inquiry and experimentation into the origins of the 'techniques of sources' (Grotowski 2001 [1981]: 258), those ancient knowledges, and practices that he believes underpin ritual, theatre and communion that have been lost to the western world as 'civilization' expanded. Put simply, these origins are the mysteries that came before cultural and individual difference, and are at the very root of spirituality, enlightenment and transformation.

Ostensibly there are no techniques per se to be learned in this period, rather it is about each person developing the capacity to engage in their own 'perpetual sense of discovery' (Grimes 2001: 272). Christof suggests that the possibility of Theatre of Sources was 'an experience of that which was primal to the self' (2019: 17), and that what Grotowski was seeking was a way for people to potentially liberate themselves from 'all cultural and social perceptions, thoughts and actions, in order that [they] could experience life in a more full manner' (Christof 2019: 17). The research activities of Theatre of Sources were curtailed when martial law was imposed in Poland in 1981. All cultural events that did not serve state

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<sup>16</sup> The text of *Theatre of Sources* published in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (2001) is based on a number of different explanations Grotowski gave in talks between 1979 and 1982. The English version was prepared by Jenna Kumiega and Jerzy Grotowski.

propaganda were cancelled and Polish state borders were closed preventing international travel.

#### **1.5.4 Stage 4: Objective Drama 1983-92**

In 1982, Grotowski was granted political asylum in America and began teaching in the USA. The *Focused Program in Objective Drama* (1983-1992) was a funded artistic research project conducted at University of California, Irvine and was an extension of the Theatre of Sources process. From 1983 to 1986, Grotowski was involved as full-time director of the programme. After 1986, it was led by Grotowski's assistant director James Slowiak, with Grotowski in attendance for two weeks each summer between 1986 and 1990. Wolford explains that the term Objective Drama is used to indicate 'those elements of the ancient rituals of various world cultures which have a precise and therefore objective impact on participants, quite apart from solely theological or symbolic significance' (Wolford 2001: 328).

The purpose of Objective Drama can be summed up as creating 'a structure within which the actor-as-human could accomplish a journey of discovery' (Wolford 1996a: 57). Wolford suggests that the purpose of the journey is for life to break through (Wolford 1996a: 58) and to '*be with another*' (Wolford 1996a: 46-47, italics in the original). I Wayan Lendra from Bali, one of the instructors on the programme, extends this possibility. He compares the Objective Drama project to Balinese art, which is a tool for bringing out the expression of the inner spirit, because 'the responsibility of the artist is to become a medium' (Lendra 2001:

323). Grotowski expands the idea of purpose further in a talk entitled *Tu es le fils de quelqu'un* (trans. You are someone's son),<sup>17</sup> in which he asserts that the actor is

faced with an extremely rigid social system,<sup>18</sup> you must deal with it; you must re-find your own freedom ... freedom is a good thing. You must fight for freedom ... never give up, but always to go one step further, one step further ... bad artists *talk* about the rebellion, but true artists *do* the rebellion ... art is the rebellion ... which pushes back the limits ... imposed by power' (Grotowski 2001: 294).

He argues that by discovering where we come from, as performers, and by standing 'in the beginning' and connecting to our sources, our humanity and our connection to others 'opens up' (Grotowski 2001 [1981]: 305). Grotowski took this exploration into the beginnings and sources of individual freedom into the next phase of research that came to be called Art as Vehicle.

#### 1.5.5 Stage 5: Art as Vehicle 1986-1999

Grotowski relocated to Italy in 1986 and established a new work centre outside the town of Pontedera, where he continued to live and work until his death in 1999. In 1996 Grotowski changed the name to *Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards*, in recognition that the practical work of the centre was in the hands of Thomas Richards and that Grotowski had 'transmitted' to him 'that to which I have arrived in my life: the *inner* aspect of the work' (Grotowski 1999: 12, italics in the original). Christof writes that Grotowski spent the last thirteen years of his life 'using art as a practical means for exploring processes of a spiritual nature' (2019: 19) and Brook suggests that when Grotowski speaks about

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<sup>17</sup> In the original journal article, the editor adds the following footnote 'The rhetoric of this article is Grotowski's. All references to gender are his'.

<sup>18</sup> This seems similar to Heidegger's concepts of *thrownness* and *The They*.

spirituality, he is using spiritual 'in the sense that, as one goes towards the interiority of man, one passes from the known to the unknown' (Brook 2001: 283). Brook makes the point that Grotowski was searching for a vehicle that enabled 'access to another level of perception [...] in the art of performance' (Brook 2001: 383). As such, '[f]or Grotowski, acting is a vehicle [...] The theatre is not an escape, a refuge. A way of life is a way to life' (Brook 2002: 12). Grotowski viewed art as a platform for personal liberation. He believed that art allows us to 'cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness - fulfil ourselves' (Grotowski 2002 [1968]: 21).

In a 1987 conference publication entitled *Performer* (always singular and always capitalized), Grotowski echoes that Performer is 'a way of being' and 'a man of action. He is not someone who plays another. He is a doer, a priest a warrior. He is outside aesthetic genres [...] a man of knowledge' (2001: 376).<sup>19</sup> The key to the heart of Performer's inner work is unlocking their ability to simply be-with-another. Art as Vehicle is not a practice that is intended to result in public performance although, as Grotowski states, 'Witnesses, outside observers, may be present or not. It depends on several conditions which, under different circumstances, this approach demands' (Grotowski 1999: 11). It is a framework, specifically of praxis, which was designed and developed for the actors, or the 'doers' as they were called at this time, to work on themselves.

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<sup>19</sup> Man of knowledge is a term used by American author Carlos Castaneda to describe the Mexican Yaqui Indian sorcerer with whom he trained and of whom he wrote in his books between 1968 and 1999. A man of knowledge is free from his 'four natural enemies' - fear, clarity, power and old age (fatigue) - only then will he (she) be awake and able to fulfil his (her) destiny. It remains unclear if they met when Grotowski was travelling in the USA in the 1970s.



## 1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the ideas and approaches of two men from entirely different fields and places, but both similarly concerned with self-transformation and the possibilities of being human. Placing the ideas of Grotowski and Erhard side by side is revealing. It illuminates how, even though their methods are apparently so different, both men are engaged in a similar quest, to unconceal 'the truth'. Truth for each of them is not a discussion about whether a proposition is identical to a fact, or whether one believes something is true if it corresponds to the way things actually are; rather, the resemblances highlighted in this part of the research emphasise how truth for both Erhard and Grotowski is expressed as the inner experience of oneself as whole and complete, which Grotowski calls becoming the holy actor and Erhard calls 'getting it'.

Grotowski states in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, '[a]lways seek for the real truth and not the popular conception of truth' (2002 [1968]: 237), and Erhard says in interview that

what it really is, is that you have to see the truth in this, rather than looking for where the truth is [...] in the simple sense of that word: given what you've got right now, if you can't see the truth in that then you can't see the truth. The truth is not found in a different set of circumstances. The truth is always and only found in the circumstances you've got. (in Sobel, 1978: unpaginated)

Grotowski also calls this state of being *hic et nunc*, being in the here and now (Grotowski 2002: 212). Erhard always referred to it in the training as 'being with what is'.

'Being here now' and 'being with what is' are expressions of ways of being that link explicitly to the process of self-transformation and its associated sense of feeling free or liberated from the constrictions of past narratives. These descriptions seem to me to draw close to, and begin to verge upon, Heidegger's understanding that truth - *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια) - is an ontological phenomenon (1962: 262-273). Being, which was previously unnoticed, is

now no longer unnoticed. That which was concealed is brought to light; it has become present, and it is visible. It is recognised for what it is.

Heidegger translated *aletheia* as uncovered or disclosed (1962: 262). I noted earlier that sharing during the *est* training involved returning to one's history and disclosing personal experiences and perspectives. Disclosing implies not only speaking something out loud to others, but also acknowledging something to oneself that had previously been unacknowledged. By acknowledging, I mean the capacity to accept something fully and completely, exactly as it is, whether it is an experience, an event or a memory. Hyde and Kopp describe *aletheia* as 'a free way of encountering beings that allows them to be the things they are' (2019: 379).

While neither of these key interlocutors works specifically in the domain of auto/biographical performance, this chapter has begun to identify what is meant by transformation, and what some of the components and dynamics are that make up the transformational experience.

## CHAPTER TWO - STORY

### 2.1 Introduction

For the purposes of this research, I am defining story as ‘one version of events’. The events may be experiences or incidents that have happened in the past, or imagined situations or circumstances that could take place in the future. A narrative is an account that connects stories and forms one point of view.

Life stories and trans-generational narratives are central to the construction of identity; ‘[i]nteractions between children and adults not only shape intergenerational practices, but also influence broader patterns of social attitudes and behaviours’ (Bessell, 2021: unpaginated). This chapter begins to distinguish the central role of story in Solo auto/biographical theatre and the way practitioners employ stories and narratives to accomplish specific goals in performance. It consists of three parts: it begins with a practitioner review and traces how each of these practitioners relates to and utilizes autobiographical storytelling in their performances. This is followed by an examination of the role of story in my own practice and in my performances. The chapter then continues with an analysis of two pieces of work I made at the beginning of the doctoral research process, *1966* and *My Year with Donald Trump*; what they revealed about Solo Autobiographical Theatre and self-transformation; and how they led directly to crafting subsequent performances.

## 2.2 Practitioner Review

### 2.2.1 Deb Margolin

Deb Margolin is an American performer and playwright. In the 1980s, she was a co-founder of feminist theatre company Split Britches, with performers Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw. Since then, she has since created a number of solo shows that use stories to bear witness. She writes

I have long felt that bearing witness is the most tender, beautiful, generous thing any one of us can do for any other. We cannot prevent each other's deaths, we can barely mitigate each other's suffering; what we can do is bear witness. (2008a: 95)

Jill Dolan states that Margolin tells 'stories that criticize conventional political assumptions and work to reorder a world out of joint' (Dolan 2008: 67). Margolin describes herself as an entirely cultural Jew, and according to Dolan, her work is filled with an atheistic, agnostic Jewish theology that places her within Judaism's historical, philosophical and metaphysical traditions, rather than the specifically religious customs (Dolan, 2008: 99). Jewishness, Dolan states, 'permeates Margolin's work' (2008: 102). Indeed, Dolan adds that Margolin's stories 're-anchored me to my own feminist, lesbian, and Jewish histories, while enabling me to feel an enhanced and broader sense of community that didn't stand on the ceremony of identity politics' (2005: 24). My own experience is similar. Margolin's courage as a writer and a performer gives me permission to acknowledge and disclose my Jewish self in public, in a way that I believe enhances the integrity of my performances.

Margolin says of the stories she chooses to write and perform: 'I investigate the great beauty as well as the immense danger of complete faith, either in God or in men' (2011: 154-155). Playwright Dominica Radulescu describes Margolin's storytelling as 'ethereal,

metaphysical, funny, raw, and melancholy, political and philosophical' (2012: 168). Her work seeks out 'the lush contradictions and ironies of human existence' and she performs 'with an earnest amazement at how we got here and how we continue to stumble through our lives' (Dolan 2008: 99). Dolan describes Margolin as

a woman who speaks eloquently of her desire and her agnostic faith. Her atypical appearance and her more metaphysical bent make her anomalous on the solo scene and have always lent her work an edgy, outsider's perspective ... her performances make visible, states of being that many of us feel but rarely see performed live. (2008: 99)

Radulescu, after seeing Margolin perform, says that Margolin speaks

to us today of our anguishes and exhilarations, the large existential questions, and simultaneously things that are done, undone, said, unsaid in the small seconds that make up our days. (2012: 169)

This is understandable when Margolin herself says that she asks herself '[w]hat can I not die without having spoken of?' (2015: unpaginated). She says of her performances that

I came to understand that, in doing onstage before a group of witnesses, those things one aches to do, one is honouring the most profound dramatic tradition by using the theatre as a place for the revelation of humanity. (Margolin 2014b: 127)

I resonate completely with this understanding.

Like Margolin, I often experience myself as outsider looking in at communities or societies to which I do not entirely belong. Over the course of this research Margolin has become a key guide for me in making explicit how to write and perform from this outsider perspective in a way that bears witness to suffering and injustice and reveals our shared humanity. Although Margolin asserts that 'language fails, both within a given performance, and without' (2008a: 95), Alker suggests that Margolin's 'words, excessive and frenzied, consume anyone who listens' (2008: 118). This is true of me; I have been consumed by

Margolin's words and writing, and for these reasons she has been an important influencer of my thinking, my writing and my performing.

### **2.2.2 Spalding Gray**

Spalding Gray (1941-2004) was a member of Richard Schechner's experimental company, The Performance Group, before co-founding The Wooster Group with Willem Dafoe and Elizabeth LeCompte. From 1980, he primarily performed autobiographical monologues which, according to Murfin 'exemplified the affective immediacy of virtuosic first-person storytelling during the 1980s and 1990s, and helped establish a distinct theatrical genre of autobiographical performance' (2018: 1). Gray used stories as a journey of self discovery. Theatre director Mark Russell encapsulates this idea when he writes: 'He broke it down to a table, a glass of water, a spiral notebook, and a mic. Poor theatre: a man, an audience, and a story. Spalding sitting at that table, speaking into the mic, piecing his life back together, one memory, one true thing at a time' (Russell, 2004a: unpaginated). Russell adds that '[y]ou felt like he was discovering parts of his life on stage as you watched him, parts that were particularly harrowing and exciting and funny. He made you feel you were part of his life' (Russell, 2004b: unpaginated).

At the time of first watching Gray in a video recording, before I began my theatre practice, I did not have the vocabulary or the terminology to describe or articulate what I was seeing. I simply knew I aspired to perform with the kind of presence I was viewing. Gray leapt off the screen; it was as if he was sitting beside me in the room, talking directly and only to me. The performance-maker Anna Deavere Smith observes that 'presence defies the limits of

the person's body, defies the actual space it takes up' (2006: 12). Demastes calls him a 'master storyteller' and a 'dynamic stage presence' (2008: 1).

Gray embodied a particular type of spontaneity which I describe as the ability, simply through recounting stories of his life, to recreate and bring forth, in the present moment something that has happened in the past. It was this quality of performance or apparent way of being that I wished to emulate. As Gray narrates his adventures and experiences, it is as if everything that had happened to him previously, effortlessly 'tumbles out of his mouth' and is alive and happening again. He respeaks events into existence in his performances, in front of the audience, even though they were long since past.

Gray did not simply tell stories about his life; he drew on his experience to live his life in public. Author and dramaturg James Leverett writes that 'It has gradually become Gray's chosen lot simultaneously to live his life and to play the role of Spalding Gray living his life, *and* to observe said Gray living his life in order to report on it in the next monologue' (Leverett, 1985: 132). He describes it as an endless playoff between performance and reality. Gray himself writes

Stories seem to fly to me and stick. They are always out there, coming in. We exist in a fabric of personal stories.... So I never wonder whether if a tree falls in the forest, will anyone hear it. Rather, who will tell about it? (1986: ix)

His performances were simultaneously self-reflective and disclosing. In interview he states that '[t]he monologue is always happening; there's no end to it as long as I exist. It's always framing existence' (in Biggs, 1991: 161). Furthermore, Gray writes

I wanted to explore myself as other [...] I no longer wanted to pretend to be a character outside myself. The streets where I encountered this other were in my body and mind. The 'other' me was the other in me, the constant witness, the constant consciousness of self. (1979: 35)

He explains to Schechner that he is an observer of himself, and that his performances are compensating for his early experience of feeling on the outside of his own community (in Schechner, 2002: 155).

Leverett suggests that Spalding Gray developed a unique method of solo performing that merged 'private experience with general cultural history to form a provocative utterly contemporary expression' (Leverett, 2000: 102). His method allowed him to go with immediacy to a unique performance of self, wherein not only is he the professional actor, Spalding Gray, exploring and discovering his performance, but he is simultaneously the narrator, telling stories about the life of a person called Spalding Gray, and at the same time performing as a character named Spalding Gray. He is all three - actor/performer, person, and character - synchronously.

### **2.2.3 Lisa Kron**

Lisa Kron states that she writes and performs autobiographical stories to explore 'themes and mechanisms of human nature and ideas' (2016: unpaginated). She says that '[s]omeone once asked me the difference between therapy and autobiographical theatre, and I said that therapy is about a person and autobiographical theatre is about an audience' (in Chessler 2016: unpaginated). My practice attempts to integrate both into a self-transformational mode.

Kron identifies as being Jewish and lesbian. Like Margolin she began her career at the New York City WOW Café, and by performing in the feminist performance troupe *Five Lesbian Brothers*. Writing about her approach to performance and storytelling, Kron states that



'[b]efore I was a playwright I told anecdotal stories on stage. At some point I began to yearn to create "theater," which I sensed was somehow different from storytelling, though I had no idea how' (n.d.: unpaginated). Kron points out that

Stories and the events they describe are not the same, though we often conflate them .... A story is a handful of elements lifted out of the infinite swirl and presented as 'what happened.' [...] Plays, on the other hand, contain stories, but the frame is expanded to show us that a storyteller exists in a context alongside other people who have different stories, and in a world with complexities beyond the comprehension of any one of them [...] if ethics is the field that asks how we ought to live and what we owe to one another, then theater's answer lies in its insistence that no single version of events can be counted as truth. Theater seeks not a single truth but a field of truth. It offers us a way of framing things that don't align, of holding in our view the confusing and elusive fact that everyone else has a consciousness as complete and worthy as our own, and the ability of any one of us to consider the world is limited in exactly the same way. (in Soloski 2013: 22)

Three of Kron's best-known works, *101 Humiliating Stories* (2001), *2.5 Minute Ride* (2001) and *Well* (2006) all provide examples of how her writing and the stories she chooses to tell apply meta-theatrical techniques to autobiographical theatre. This is one particular aspect of her work that has most informed my practice during this doctoral project.

Both *101 Humiliating Stories* and *2.5 Minute Ride* are solo auto/biographical performances in which Kron describes herself as 'flipping back and forth in her relationship with the audience, from being a performer on stage, to being a person in the room with many other people' (2006: xi). In *101 Humiliating Stories*, Kron draws her stories specifically from her own past experiences; in *2.5 Minute Ride* she sets out to tell the story of her father's life, his experience and their relationship. It expands to include members of the wider family on both her father's side of the family and her mother's. *Well*, on the other hand, is an ensemble piece that Kron describes as a 'solo show with other people in it who do not know the rules of theatre' (2006: xi). In this piece, the focus is on her relationship with her mother, and her

mother's experiences. All three works are intended to create what Kron calls 'a primary experience rather than a reflection of past experiences' (2001: xiv). Place also features heavily in all three: Lansing, Michigan; Cedar Point, Ohio; Germany; Auschwitz, Poland. They are deliberately described only sketchily, leaving the audience to use their imagination to fill in the detail.

Kron told me in interview that she has always been interested in learning how to "feel and shape the energy in the room" (Kron, 2019). The stories she tells are there to 'to make an authentic connection with the audience' (Kron, 2006: ix). She admits that when the rules are broken in performance and suddenly things, seemingly are out of control, 'it's a theatrical conceit, of course, but it makes the audience feel the electricity of something happening right now in this moment' (Kron 2006: xi). It is in these intersections, contradictions and conversational detours that Kron believes 'the traditional performer-audience relationship is subverted and [...] it creates the delicious illusion that anything could happen next' (2006: xi). I have learned from these descriptions and have attempted to devise and incorporate this facet of subversion in all the performances I have made during the research process.

#### **2.2.4 Ken Campbell**

Ken Campbell (1941-2008) is considered 'one of the most original and unclassifiable talents in the British theatre of the past half-century' (Coveney, 2008: unpaginated), as well as 'one of the most outstanding and prolific of imaginative storytellers' (Merrifield 2011: 15). Writer, composer and long-term collaborator of Campbell's, James Nye, suggests that Campbell's performances were commentaries on 'the weirdness of human experience' (2009:

unpaginated), and director Richard Eyre writes that Campbell had a 'vast sense of wonder, of the ridiculousness of the ordinary and the commonness of the bizarre' (2009: unpaginated). Theatre critic Michael Coveney proposes that Ken Campbell's theatrical world 'isn't art or even theatre exactly' (2011: 81-82); it is as if 'when you walk out of something of Ken's, the whole world looks different [...] you start looking at the world as an artistic phenomenon' (Langham in Coveney 2011: 68).

Merrifield explains that the stories Campbell chose to tell were 'largely autobiographical studies of often small and seemingly insignificant incidents that Ken then formed into amazing narrative discourse' (2011: 430). Coveney writes that

[h]e draws (and elaborates) on his private life, his fantasies and the detailed topography of Ilford, the River Lea and Walthamstow Marshes - with diversions to such exotic locations as Stoke-on-Trent, Paddington, Newfoundland and the sand dunes in Croyde, Devon. In Campbell, ordinary meets alternative life-style to an unprecedented degree, as if John Betjeman had mated with Spalding Gray. (2005: unpaginated)

It was often difficult to distinguish which of the characters or episodes he recounted were factually accurate and which were fictional embellishments, drawn solely from Campbell's untamed imagination. Merrifield reports that 'he managed to make much of what he said sound like his own life, even though those parts may have been the most carefully crafted and rehearsed' (2011: 378). Langham notes that, 'I can never quite put my finger on Ken's style; he abhorred naturalism because it was just boring but, on the other hand, he also abhorred untruthfulness' (in Coveney 2011: 84). Campbell developed a mode of performance which, writer and director Michael Kustow describes as a mastery of making 'elastic and illusory the boundary between digression and substance, foreground and distance' (in Merrifield 2011: 381). Drawing on his experience and knowledge of ventriloquism, Campbell was able to delineate characters by 'contorting every fibre of his body to emit a diapason of

voices, resonating from forehead, palette, throat, nose, ears, nape, solar plexus' (in Merrifield 2011: 379).

Campbell had learned from the British comic Ken Dodd 'that every comedian possessed two realities about themselves, the actual one they live and the one they talk about in their performances' (Merrifield 2011: 338). In a Ken Campbell performance, it is often impossible to distinguish which of his anecdotes are exaggerations, which are true, and which are invented. As Merrifield observes 'Campbell monologues were tales of wild invention, based extravagantly on real life' (Merrifield 2011: 340). Indeed, when I asked Campbell's long-standing director, Colin Watkeys, whether certain of Campbell's characters actually existed, he answered nostalgically, 'I don't know, we'll never know, I never wanted to know, so I never asked. Knowing would have detracted from the performance. The stories were there to serve a bigger purpose. Ken never let a story get in the way of the truth and he was a seeker of truth' (Watkeys, 2018). Ken Campbell's daughter, Daisy Campbell, shared with me that her father's storytelling was rooted in a 'stance of questioning the consensus agreement about reality, which was one he had held throughout his life, from the time he was a teenager' (Campbell, 2021).

Campbell was well known in the latter part of his career for his monologues and solo performances. He developed a highly personal, very distinct mode of expression (by this I mean style; a blend of texture, tone, structure of language, stagecraft and theatricality) that combined for example, comedy with Jungian psychology, quantum physics and questions about the nature of reality with music hall gags and medieval French poetry. In his scripts he employed ambiguity and pun (e.g., a knee thing/anything, an earth thing/unearthing), and seamlessly married current affairs, urban myths with his own schoolboy experiences, in a whirlwind of enthusiasm and excitement. Coveney writes that 'Campbell's theatre is always

double edged. He operates 'sideways-on to the material, bending it this way and that for effect' (Coveney 2011: 134).

Campbell offered me a way of performing that I found intriguing and aspired to learn from and emulate. In particular his 'off beat' (unusual) references, his humour, his outlook on life, his ability to make abstruse connections, his boundless energy, and particularly "his role in life as a genuine alternative" (Coveney 2011 p. 234), all speak to me and remind me of my own narrative and self-image. I saw him 'live' twice; once in a theatre performance and the other in a subsequent talk, and it seems to me there was little to distinguish between the talk and the one man show, except perhaps for their duration. I do not find it surprising that his performances inspire me and ignite my imagination. It is not a long leap to base my own performance material on ideas that are stimulated by watching his. I return to Campbell's work and his influence on my practice in Chapter Four.

### **2.2.5 Selina Thompson**

Thompson is a performance artist based in the United Kingdom. She identifies as 'a black, working class, queer, fat woman' (Thompson 2019: unpaginated). Her work focuses on the intersection of identity, politics and environment. Elliott describes Thompson's performance in an early autobiographical show entitled *Chewing the Fat* (2014) as 'part art, part theatre, part stand-up comedy, part story-telling, and part an outer-body experience of watching a tea party through a wonderfully thoughtful looking glass' (2014: unpaginated).

I found myself particularly attracted to Thompson's work as it is poetic, risky and challenging. She states

theatre is not a safe space - I do not create safe spaces in the theatres that I'm in. If we're all together in a room and I'm talking eating disorders and fat, that's not a safe space for a lot of people. If we're in a room and I'm talking about slavery, that's not a safe place for anybody! The audience enter that space and risk being triggered: you could be made to feel uncomfortable or made to deal with stuff you absolutely don't want to deal with (in Cleaves, undated, unpaginated).

Many of the themes that Thompson tackles in her work are resonant with questions and concerns of my own. She describes her personal quest as heading towards a greater understanding of

'[h]ow we shape our narratives of home, what it means to be an ancestor and what it means to be a descendent and why that matters and if it matters' (undated a: unpaginated). Her work is unreservedly auto/biographical, as she writes it is 'autobiographical work with a research element. I knew that was the form that I wanted to work in first.' (undated b, unpaginated).

And in a way that suggests some distant similarities to my own experience, she states that (responds to minor correction 4 and is changed from 'is similar to')

There's no catharsis for a story about the diaspora or a story about race because none of it's finished, none of it's resolved or dealt with, it's just held. What you're always negotiating is how you can hold it (in Cleaves, undated: unpaginated).

This unfinished, ever unfolding story of diaspora in my own life has been a recurring theme in my performances, exploring how it relates to my experience of place, space and relationships. While there may not be a 'catharsis' for the 'story about the diaspora or a story about race' the thesis explores whether it is possible to transform one's relationship to, and experience of, those particular narratives from one of constriction or suffering to one of agency, empowerment and belonging.

## 2.3 Discovering My Own Solo Practice

Naïvely perhaps, from the very beginning of my journey into theatre and performance I chose to use solo auto/biographical theatre as the primary term to describe my new-found-path. Prior to 2011-12, when I wrote, rehearsed and performed my first solo auto/biographical work, *Moses, Morris, Harry & me*, I had no experience of solo performance, autobiographical theatre, autobiographical performance, or Self-Revelatory Theatre, nor any other autoethnographic form of therapeutic theatre.<sup>20</sup> I had a minimal understanding of stagecraft or the aesthetics of theatre, I had very few acting skills per se and virtually no knowledge of the debates, language or distinctions of theatre and performance. My theatre experience was limited to playing the *King of Hearts* in a primary school production of *Alice in Wonderland* when I was 11 years old, and then, after a gap of nearly half a century, a brief sojourn as a player in an amateur Playback Theatre company that was in the earliest stages of its development and practice.<sup>21</sup> That brief experience was almost ten years prior to the commencement of this research. Boal would have called me an ‘untrained performer’ (1992: xix). By this I mean, not a professional actor, with no formal training in acting or performance skills, and at that time little or no experience of acting on stage, in front of a live audience, most specifically not as a solo performer.

As I stated earlier, in the context of my own practice and of this research, I consider the purpose and process of devising a solo auto/biographical theatre performance as enabling the performer to relate to their history in such a way as to liberate themselves from any

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<sup>20</sup> *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50JebA87gaU>

<sup>21</sup> Playback Theatre is a unique form of improvisational theatre founded in 1975 in New York by Jonathan Fox, Jo Salas and the original Playback Theatre company. It is an ensemble form of auto/biographical theatre that is created through the interaction of the players/performers and audience members.

constrictions that detract or prevent them from fulfilling their personal potential. These constrictions could originate in:

- Their personal story - i.e., the story a person tells themselves about themselves
- Their inherited, trans-generational, family narratives
- Any politically or socially, taken-for-granted discourses or other unexamined assumptions that masquerade as universal truths in the 'public square' (the sphere of public opinion).

This possibility, that solo auto/biographical theatre has a transformational and liberating potential, was the singular, most decisive, discovery I made in my own process of devising and performing *Moses, Morris, Harry & me*. This performance was made within the academic framework of an MA in Creative Conflict Transformation through the Arts at University College St. Mark and St. John (Marjon's), Plymouth, under the supervision of David Oddie.<sup>22</sup> My intention then was to become a mediator and peacebuilder, not a theatre performer.<sup>23</sup>

## 2.4 Doctoral Study Period - First Performances

In this section, I discuss the practice-research elements of the first two years of my doctoral study. During this period (2016 - 2017), I performed four times, once at the *Drop the Story Festival* in 2016 in Totnes, UK and again at the festival in 2017; once in front of a small group of colleagues in a peer support group, and once at the University of Plymouth as part

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<sup>22</sup> David Oddie OBE is a performer, lecturer and teacher. He is the founder of the Barbican Theatre, Plymouth, Devon U.K. and Director of the Indra Congress, a global network of people and organisations. He was the programme co-lead on the MA in Creative Conflict Transformation. His commitment is to developing the creative arts, particularly with young people, as a resource for building bridges across perceived boundaries and barriers, and to support the process of reconciliation and contribute to the peaceful transformation of conflict. He is an experienced practitioner of community theatre, and a pioneer in drama for social justice; he is also an experienced solo performer. David Oddie has written about this himself in a book called *A Journey of Art and Conflict: Weaving Indra's Net*.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed description of peace building as an act of moral imagination see *The Moral Imagination: The art and Soul of Building Peace*, Lederach, John Paul (2005).



of the *PEP* research group's (Performance-Experience-Presence) series of talks, workshops and performances.

My performance in 2016 was called *1966* (See Figure 2 below). This was still very early on in the PhD project, and I considered it a *Work-in-Progress*, or scratch performance. I had written a script that I considered multi-layered, and more complex than anything I had written before. This piece focused on what Heddon refers to as 'local stories of more historical grand-narratives' (2008: 54) and the piece set my personal experiences in 1966, when I was 17 years old, against a backdrop of the wider cultural influences of the time: the Vietnam war, the Civil Rights protests and demonstrations, Nuclear Disarmament and other political events of the period. Unfortunately, due to (typically unavoidable festival) circumstances, I was only able to perform twenty minutes of what was probably 75 minutes' worth of material. However, this short performance became an important turning point in my understanding of solo auto/biographical theatre. The events of that evening, as it unfolded, catalysed and provoked a series of new insights that a) added to my repertoire of skills as a solo performer, b) generated the possibility of a new material for future performances, and c) provided greater understanding of the dynamics and the self-transformational potential of solo auto/biographical theatre.



Figure 2. *1966*, performed at *Drop the Story Festival*, The Hex, Dartington Hall, October 2016.

Scratch performances are testing grounds; they allow ‘artists a safe space to experiment while providing direct access to the results of that experimentation’ (Trueman 2009: unpaginated). These unfinished performances are ‘designed to facilitate artists in exploring ideas in front of an audience, to take risks with the material they present and to use audience feedback in order to help think through the next steps in developing the work’ (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama report, 2013: 6).<sup>24</sup> Both the process and the work itself are intentionally raw, incomplete and unpolished. The outcomes of the scratch performance impact the ongoing development and shape any future performances. Scratch performances are therefore exploratory processes that occur in real time and as a live event

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<sup>24</sup> By facilitate, I mean assist the progress of something.

in-front of live audience. My own (short) experience as a solo performer, and very brief time improvising in a Playback Theatre Company, have taught me that rehearsals and improvisations by their very nature include accidents, upsets, chaos, surprises, mistakes and failures, all to be viewed as genuinely important and creatively generative moments. All these occurred on the night of the performance in 2016.

When I was suddenly interrupted at the beginning of the performance by members of the audience, who announced in loud and no uncertain terms that they were ‘in the wrong venue and at the wrong performance’, I was unexpectedly forced to improvise. Although I am quite seasoned at thinking on my feet in workshops and training courses, and to some degree from performing Playback, this was an entirely new experience for me. I found myself attempting, simultaneously, to manage the interruption, manage my sense of self and maintain presence, maintain some proximity to my script, steer the audience’s expectations and attention away from the disturbance and back to me, and to make any new contributions to the overall process relevant, inclusive, appropriate and respectful. I improvised, first in conversation with the departing couple, who were as embarrassed as I was flummoxed, then with the audience, to whom I recounted an entirely apposite episode from my teens when I saw Spike Milligan interact spontaneously with latecomers to his performance in *Son of Oblomov*,<sup>25</sup> until I was able to guide my performance back towards the material I had planned.

The performer Wendy Houstoun confirmed this strategy,

You can’t just surrender the whole thing. Well you could, but it’s very hard to come back from that, on your own. It’s performatively very hard, on your own. So you tend to always be in control, in one way or another, even if you are pretending not to be. (in Dey, 2015: 186-187)

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<sup>25</sup> *Son of Oblomov* was an adaptation of Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov*. The classic play *Oblomov* opened at the Lyric Theatre London in 1964 with the comedian Spike Milligan cast in the lead role. After five unsuccessful weeks at the Lyric, the show transferred to the Comedy Theatre in the West End, where it was retitled *Son Of Oblomov* and played successfully as a comedy for three years. I retell this story in a later performance *A Work-in Progress*. The format/script can be found as Appendix Six.

However, I am aware that the audience did not know whether this entire incident was a planned part of the performance or not. The kind of interruption that happened to me, when the performer seems to lose control of events, causes the audience to experience uncertainty and unpredictability. This is the type of event in which, according to Lisa Kron, the audience feels a 'jolt of excitement ... when the traditional performer / audience relationship is subverted' (2006: xi) and is in itself a threshold to new possibilities.

The performance *1966* took place in late Autumn 2016. Only weeks later, in November, Donald Trump was elected President of the USA. Early in the morning after the result was announced, I overheard a conversation in a coffee shop between two people (that I did not know). The first sentence was 'Is there a mushroom cloud in the sky today?' which immediately cast me back to my experiences of the 1960s. When I am creating a new performance, I generate ideas, and inspiration from everything, from objects in shop windows, to TV shows, photographs, books, and conversations. This snatch of overheard dialogue became the trigger for the further development of *1966*. Contemporaneously to this conversation, I was revisiting some of Ken Campbell's work.

In preparation for *1966*, I paid particular attention to the short talk Campbell gave on education and creativity to a group of teachers (Campbell, 2012), in which he can be seen using direct address, fragments of auto/biography, music, voice, poetry, doggerel, humour and a trail of everyday objects (including dental floss and cotton wool) with which he litters his stage and then transforms from their original use to mystical artwork or esoteric symbols to illustrate his examples, themes and topics (without ever directly mentioning creativity or education). This lecture-type style of performance was delivered in Campbell's inimitable, surreal, 'style of riotous work' (Coveney, 2008: unpaginated). His short presentation closely matched the most recent developments in my thinking about *1966* and reading Coveney's

biography, it became clear that Campbell and I share similar backgrounds (2011: 1-12). This included a suburban London upbringing, fathers who were avid cricketers, family with roots in Liverpool, grammar school education, Latin lessons at school from very unusual teachers, who in one way or another barely survived the second world war, socialism, folk music and listening to the radio comedy of the time (for example, the Goons, Kenneth Williams and Tony Hancock).

I had concluded, after the election of Donald Trump, that the next piece I devised would expand to include the full decade of the 1960s, through which I would illustrate how my personal concerns about the contemporary social, political crises of 2016-17 are distinctly parallel to those of the 1960s when I attended grammar school. The anecdotes and themes that emerged in my memory, from Campbell's references, his sense of humour, his outlook on life, his ability to make abstruse connections, his boundless energy, and particularly his role in life as a genuine alternative (Coveney, 2011: 234), all contributed to my devising a *Campbellesque* type monologue and developing my own expression as a solo performer at this early stage of practice. In particular, I used a similar structure to Campbell's - a synthesis of a lecture and a performance - and the same range of stories drawing on school day experiences, to integrate the original script from 1966 with new ideas and material. These compared art, poetry and music of the 1960s to contemporary commentary and journalism, contrasting political motivation and idealism of the 1960s to 2016 and 2017. This new performance would eventually be called *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump*.

Campbell's monologues, on first sight, may seem to be a disjointed or fragmented gathering of discontinuous (random) elements. His anecdotes, poems, readings, artefacts do not appear to be located together in any specific time, space or sequence. They seem to defy logic. There is no apparent narrative or plot. However, by using a series of quite complex

loops, returns and connections, he composes an entirely satisfying, coherent and complete performance. Kustow says

Ken is a walking human junk shop, bricolage on rubbery legs. You are led from one glittering trophy - a story, a character, a prop, a memory - to another; you can't recall how you got from one to the next, he lets his mind spool out every which way, but over two-and-a-half solo hours the net tightens and, cliffhangingly, it all coheres. (in Coveney, 2011: 191)

Ken Campbell told the actor and comedian John Bird that Spalding Gray gave him the clue to what he wanted to do as a storyteller - that is, 'looking at something sideways and creating something better as a result' (in Coveney, 2011: 194). Coveney suggests that

It's a characteristic of all the Campbell monologues that he revisits the past in order to make it more interesting than it was or might have been. And to stitch it all together in order to create the illusion that life makes sense. (2011: 195)

Similarly, Mike Pearson, when speaking about his own performance, *Bubbling Tom* (2000), calls these kind of returns and loops 'narrative wormholes'.<sup>26</sup> He states, 'You can mention something, and it won't appear until long after, but it will be there' (in Dey, 2015: 243).

## **2.5 Performance Analysis: *State of the Union- My Year with Donald Trump***

Informed by all these new features and components, I began to re-organise my script, and at the 2017 *Drop the Story Festival*, I performed *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump* for the first time.<sup>27</sup> The full script of this performance can be read as Appendix One of this thesis.

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<sup>26</sup> Pearson's idea of *narrative wormholes* draws on a concept in the general theory of relativity known as an Einstein-Rosen bridge, or wormhole, which is a postulated method, of moving from one point in space to another without crossing the space between.

<sup>27</sup> *Drop the Story Festival* is a Solo Auto/biographical Theatre Festival held annually between 2013 and 2019, of which I was a co-founder and festival co-director. Its predecessor was called *Nearly Real Solo Theatre Festival*, of which I was the founder and sole director. Organisation of the festival always demanded a high level of attention, which was often at the expense of my own performance preparation.

Rachel Hann argues that ‘scenographies move spectators and performers emotionally as well as physically’ (2019: 5). This idea is important because in 2017 the festival had returned to its original venue, a small, intimate, old stone building that, at all other times is, a non-denominational bereavement centre and funeral parlour. Thus, the venue adds a dimension of spirituality and otherworldliness for both the audience and the performers in an act that Hann calls ‘worlding’ (2018: unpaginated). In conjunction with the audience, the location creates a world within a world, in which (in this case) life stories can be performed and matters of life and death can be considered and discussed openly. The hall has room for a maximum of sixty people in the audience. Immediately upon entry the festival goer appreciates that the place is infused with an atmosphere of intimacy and connection. The small scale, the stone walls, glass windows and wooden beams make an ideal setting for solo performances, which means that very little additional scenery is required. The lighting is ‘low tech’, the house lights can be on or off; we make use of a few standing up-lights or table lamps. There is no stage per se, only a small performance area; the audience sit in two semi circles around the space.

This performance lasted for about an hour. My intention was to draw the audience’s attention towards, and to provoke a theatrical dialogue with them about, the impact of the politics of 2016 on their lives. I used the wooden box that had appeared in all my previous performances (the box can be seen in Figure 2), it suggests history; it was filled with props that included an array of 1960s artefacts and paraphernalia: record player, LPs (long playing albums), posters and books alongside more recent magazines intended to connect more recent history with the present. My costume was minimal and was intended to suggest me as a teenager. Although I had spent considerable time re-working the script to include new monologues, asides, returns and other script-writing devices, and included music, songs and

poetry, it remained, nonetheless, very much a *Work-in-Progress*. Again, due to the pressures of organising the festival and directing a number of the other performers, I had left myself little time to rehearse. This lack of preparation meant that from the beginning of the performance I carelessly strayed from the script and once again found myself improvising whichever stories and memories came to mind in the moment. The props were laid out randomly across the small performance space and I moved spontaneously but quite randomly between them. Due to the proximity of the audience, they were able to see, follow and scrutinise all my actions, hesitations and inactions.

My own experience of the performance was that it felt 'sloppy', clumsy and chaotic. It lacked form, structure and cohesion. I had attempted to structure the script according to the format I had identified in Ken Campbell's performances, but I did not feel that this was successful. The loops and returns I attempted in the storytelling felt contrived and unnatural, out of place. My movements, because they were not blocked, or practised did not feel intentional or significant. They occurred to me, even as I was performing, as hurried, superficial, lacking meaning. By and large, I felt that this was not acting or performing as I had intended it; by which I mean evacuating myself as an identity and a personality, and thereby becoming and performing as the character called me. This was simply me/Mo, the referent, as Griffin uses the term (Griffin, 2004: 156), on stage 'doing my usual thing' and it occurred to me both during and after the performance as self-indulgent.<sup>28</sup> As performer Bobby Baker states

[...] everything I do, I am asking that question - Why am I doing this, is it self-indulgent? Sometimes one does stray into that, definitely and it always has to come back to - Why am I doing this, what is this about? (in Dey, 2015: 232)

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<sup>28</sup> See section 0.13 the Literature Review in the Introduction to the thesis.



In other words, 'I did not come back' (and here I mean 'I' the performer and character); the character's actions did not serve the audience. The sense of 'conversation' I was attempting to establish with the audience did not produce any dramatic or theatrical tension. There was no mystery, no uncertainty or ambiguity, no 'edge'. By 'no edge' I mean lacking in complexity, intensity or possibility. Nor were there any other elements of storytelling that make the performance compelling - e.g., pitch, tone, rhythm, drawing the audience into the story with the performer.

I (the referent) was left with the impression and opinion that I had not taken the audience on the journey with me; that I had failed entirely to implicate the audience, to leave them with any sense of the scope or urgency of what was happening to them politically, socially and culturally or to move them emotionally in any way. Indeed, the majority of the performance lacked any authentic emotional delivery. I, the character, failed to express any sense of my own conflicts or frustration, my own feeling of inner powerlessness to make a difference. When these components of performance are present, they demonstrate what the playwright Aaron Sorkin calls 'intention and obstacle' (2021: unpaginated), which create interest and engage the audience.

In this particular performance, I did not experience any sense of personal transformation, liberation or re-authoring of my personal narrative. Unlike in *Moses, Morris, Harry & me*, there were no moments of transcending time or space, no seeing a narrative from the point of view of another, no sense of self-as-source of my own ways of being. I failed to differentiate between myself as referent and myself as performer or the subject of the performance. It was all too familiar and comfortable.

There is however one exception. I did experiment with freeing my singing voice, and my choice to sing in public was the most important development in my practice.

As with most of the performances in the festival, we followed-up my piece with what we have come to refer to as a community conversation. This is an opportunity for the audience to share any responses they have had to what they have seen, share any experiences they felt particularly connected to, and discuss any aspects of the performance about which they would like to know more. Invariably the audience is generous, supportive and forgiving and this was equally true about my show. Indeed, as a provocation, it generated a long discussion about people's responses and reactions to Donald Trump's presidency. However, this remained a superficial, discussion, replete with opinions and generalisations. This conversation indicated to me that the performance had failed to connect people to their deeper feelings, their anxieties, fears or dreams; it fell short of touching the deeper human condition. There were no new realizations. On reflection it became clear that I had not undertaken taken an 'inner journey'. I had not shared my inner-self - only my own political opinions, my familiar stances and position in relation to American political life. There was nothing about my *inner* personal journey through the 1960s, no intention or obstacle. There was nothing revealed, nothing transmitted, and as a consequence, nothing transformed.

A further reflective conversation after the performance with a colleague and friend (Ouri Cohen, no relation) who is a theatre director, and who had been in the audience and watched the performance, opened even more insights. Cohen described my performance as lacking presence or coherence: while it was dynamic, spontaneous and immediate, I, the actor, was not present to or in my own performance. He also

used a different term: I was not mindful of the actions and interactions I was creating, moment by moment. I was not paying attention to the impact of the stories I was sharing on the audience; my acting choices and the selection of stories were not deliberate, therefore I could not determine how my delivery would be understood, perceived or experienced. He described my performance as 'not being theatre'. He thought it was more like a creative way I might design and deliver one of my organisational development workshops. He frequently said it was not 'tight' (exact); it lacked precision, it was haphazard. He also thought that the identity of the character I was playing was not clear, and that I had to be far more systematic in using my body to indicate which 'Mo' was on stage at any and every moment. He believed I should slow down the whole performance and create a less frenetic tempo. My colleague left me with a very precise instruction, which I went on to follow: to use a small pallet, 1 metre square as stage, not to allow myself to step off it and 'to see what comes'. Issues of presence and persona became a new strand of research and are discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

## **2.6 Performing the Story**

In Chapter One, I explained that Grotowski believed in the potential to fuse ritual and theatre in the pursuit of personal freedom. Therefore, in order to provide a prompt to 'see what comes' I quite literally asked myself the questions: 'what would Grotowski do? Given his revolutionary ideas about the relationship between spaces and audiences, how would he approach a 'poverty' of space, both in rehearsal and in performance? How would Grotowski show the inner conflict between a young man in

the 1960s and an old man in 2017? Could a small space provoke a different kind of inner journey? How can I consciously apply what I have been reading, researching and learning about Grotowski, to my practice, in the same way I attempted to draw on Campbell in *State of the Union*? In response to the questions, I began adapting the script, attempting to create what Grotowski calls a montage: using a variety of texts as material and ‘assembling of a rapid set of images that taken together lead the spectator to certain themes’ (in Schechner, 2001b: 27). Unlike Campbell’s monologues I began to imagine something more theatrical and/or ceremonial.

Given the inherent linearity of the auto/biographical story I was attempting to tell (1966-2017), I was also particularly interested in experimenting with a non-narrative, nonlinear, circular montage ‘to see what comes’. Learning from, and building on, the performance failures discussed in this chapter, and their lack of form and structure, it had become clear to me that I needed to orchestrate a tighter, much more composed piece. Rather than relying on structures with which I was familiar, including plot and characters, I began to assemble short pieces of auto/biographical prose, and poetry that seemed apposite, lists and relevant sequences of numbers that were thematic and could effectively be repeated, told in any order and still make sense to the audience.

My unconscious thinking took me to images I had encountered in the opera *Einstein on the Beach* by Phillip Glass and Robert Wilson (1975-1976). What made these memories particularly relevant is that *Einstein on the Beach* has a non-narrative, circular structure, and uses simple but highly repetitive sequences of syllables, numbers, and snippets of poetry. There are four acts which are connected by short interludes, known as Knee-Plays; these are intended to provide a sense of coherence

to the whole. *Einstein on the Beach* is a five-hour performance. During the performance the audience are free to come and go at will. My memories of this production became the springboard for devising what would eventually become an entirely new version of *My Year with Donald Trump*.

Arthur Holmberg writes that *Einstein on the Beach* is non-linear, but it is not non-narrative. He suggests that

One characteristic of [...] *Einstein on the Beach* is the profusion of narrative fragments that cross, crash and collide on stage. These narrative fragments however may be difficult to recognise. The gaps between the fragments are larger than the fragments giving the spectator who wants a story acres of empty space in which to construct one. (1996: 11)

Not only does non-linear writing and storytelling create spaces for imagination, but it also has the potential for disorientation, the possibility of interrupting established or habitual thinking and thereby create an opening for transformation and new possibilities. This initial thinking about *Einstein on the Beach* guided me back to the potential of Grotowski's performance structure called *Action*.

*Action* is a transformational event, whose primary purpose is not to create meaning in the perception of an outside observer, but rather to facilitate a special process that can occur within the practitioner. This process involves a transformation of consciousness - energy and awareness - that is 'not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but to Presence' (Grotowski, 1995: 125). Furthermore, Grotowski states clearly that

Action is not a performance. It does not belong to the domain of art as presentation. It is an opus created in the field of art as vehicle. It is conceived to structure, in a material linked to performing arts, the work on oneself of the doers. Witnesses, outside observers, may be present or not. (Grotowski, 1999)

Lisa Wolford (1996b: 134-153) and Thomas Richards (2008: 129-132), both suggest that Action is not necessarily narratively structured. They argue that a better analogy for Action is poetry rather than prose (Wolford, 1996b: 136, Richards, 1997: 58-59). They agree that any sense of a narrative is so loosely drawn in Action that it is more open to the spectators' own associations or projections than to any meaning originally put into the Action by its creators. Richards extends this to suggest that both the story and nonstory of Action are simultaneously present as a potential; it is something that 'can almost be understood like an awake dream, or like a dream of awakening-by someone who's watching, all around that which is the essence of this work, around this 'inner' aspect related to the transformation of energy' (in Wolford, 2001: 421). Metaphorically, it is the transformation of coarser energy to more subtle, finer energy that is central to Action.

In terms of this research and understanding the dynamics of transformation, I relate this energetic aspect of Action to the liberatory experience of unhitching myself from my story. Richards states

A kind of "forgiveness" can appear in you and flow in two directions, from you towards your partner and also toward yourself: it is like a gentle sigh inside a kind of release that unties the interhuman knots and makes the moment shine and stand on its own potential, not weighed down by the past and the future. (Richards, 2008: 131).

Grotowski's approach is often considered to be quasi-religious, spiritual or monastic and his workshops and preparation periods often have long periods of silence. However

the room where Action is done is not a performance space in the conventional sense of the term. Nor is it a 'ritual space' [...] it is simply a room, a place where people once went about their business in ordinary ways. (Wolford, 2001: 411)

The room in which Wolford sees an Action is lit only by ordinary electric lights and some candles. She describes how the environment is transformed, when the performance begins, into a liminal space, a threshold, in which the audience is re-positioned not as

spectators/observers but as witnesses (Wolford, 2001: 411). This description aligned with my expectation that (literally) after using a pallet to experiment and rehearse, when I returned to the simple setting of the bereavement centre to perform publicly, I would be able to create a similar environment.

At this point I rehearsed with Mark Drummond, who had originally directed *Moses, Morris, Harry & me*, and had continued to support my development as a performer periodically over the intervening period. I showed him the new material I had been working on. The ensuing discussion with Drummond, and his astute observations particularly about intention proved to be another important turning point in the devising process.

In this rehearsal we used a screen (room divider) as a device to mark the performance area. In the course of improvising, it morphed into a confession box/stall which I used to stand in and to deliver some parts of the script. Drummond observed that I (Mo - the referent) 'did not know yet, what my material was about, and so it was not clear whether the words spoken by the character Mo were a prayer, a confession, a meditation, a conversation with my Jewish ancestors, a lecture or something else entirely'. He counselled me not to rush to a conclusion about this, nor to turn any insights into a performance, yet. Heddon and Milling refer to this period of experimentation, and not rushing to conclusions, as the devising practice of 'Shaking stuff around' (2006: 206). Moreover, this idea overlaps with Bobby Baker's caution that

[...] There is a drive, a kind of craze, an urge, when you get an idea. You want to communicate it to people, but the very starting point for me is to resolve issues, resolve things - thoughts, intellectual notions - for myself and that has to be part of a decision about what kind of work to make. (in Gale and Gardner, 2004: 243)

After this rehearsal, I recrafted the script taking into account Drummond's feedback. The discussions had revealed three central and related questions: 'Who is the character on stage, what does he want to say, and how is he saying it?' I wrote later:

*This character has lost faith, and lost direction. He has made the easy choices and lost his voice. He has recently rediscovered parts of himself that have been anaesthetised, they are joining forces with one-another, all these parts that have all been paralysed. And now a giant voice is reawakening, thundering, gathering momentum, ready to 'make holes in the wall' (Grotowski, 1989: 294). So, I need to show a character moving from the dark to the light, from asleep to awake, from silence to thunder (Reflective Journal, 2017).*

As I reflected, it became clear to me that if I wanted to tell the story of an awakening, of a personal transformation, in a nonlinear fashion, I had a choice about the primary character on stage. He could either be the teenager on the streets demonstrating, protesting, waving placards, chanting slogans in a battle with the forces of evil, weaving the story from then until now, or he could be a mature and seasoned 'elder', who no longer considers life in such polarised terms of right and wrong, looking backwards and forwards, between now and then. It became evident in my own mind that I wanted to focus on my experience of the past eight years of gradually becoming an artist and a performer.

Because I was searching for a theatre aesthetic (mode of expression) that could simultaneously represent (symbolically and metaphorically) and exemplify (specifically illustrate and recount) my journey back to becoming a performer in a new and different way, I was drawn to Grotowski's description of Performer (see Chapter One). He describes Performer both as a state of being and as a question of be-ing (Grotowski, 2001: 376-377). Be-ing, he suggests, is not something that comes from what you have learned, or from anything outside yourself. It comes from 'being faithful to your process' or what he refers to as 'your destiny'. He states, 'Performer with a capital letter is [...] not somebody who plays another' (Grotowski, 2001: 376). Distinguishing Performer in this way fit precisely with what



I was attempting to achieve in this performance specifically and in my wider practice, which is to liberate myself from the stories that I consider inhibit me from being faithful to my process and my destiny.

Drummond and I rehearsed again several weeks later. At this point, I included an emerging idea of using bamboo poles to signify a path or a way, and new writing that involved sequences of numbers and dates that were intended to indicate the passages of time from the sixties to today (e.g., 22-04-1954, 10-07-1980, 03-02-1991, etc) and to implicate the audience by suggesting their birthdays or year of birth. I inserted poetry from the 1960s alongside some shorter poetry-prose I wrote about the period between 2016 and 2018.

In this rehearsal, after an improvisation using the screen as the confession box, with inconsequential results, and drawing on Langer's mindfulness practices (2014 [1989]: 80), Drummond recommended I stand in the box, hold a long silence, and see what 'comes up'. In my experience, when I create the space to decompress, new material can often be generated. Uninterrupted, solitary thinking allows me the opportunity to reclaim lost voices, discover new perspectives and see with new eyes. Whenever I afford myself the space and time of contemplation, or extended thinking, without interruption from others, there is time to bypass my habitual thinking and for light to reach unilluminated, forgotten or neglected memories, resources, ideas and possibilities. Grotowski calls this 'working on the mind' and states that the Romanian philosopher Mircea Eliade refers to such techniques as 'deconditioning' (2001: 260).

In the speech, *Tu es le fils de quelqu'un*, Grotowski describes a different version of Action, which he refers to as 'a kind of ethnodrama' (1987: 38). In this, the actor begins with a song rooted in their ethno-religious or cultural tradition and creates a performance structure within which they recreate their association and connection with a specific ancestor,

or other source material of their own culture. Building on specific concrete details, the actor develops a character that reconnects them to ancient or past situations that communicate the essential elements of past events to the audience (Grotowski, 2001: 294). What came up in the confessional were just such source material: thoughts, memories and images of visiting my disabled sister, Ruth, in Great Ormond Street Hospital, London in the late 1950s or early 1960s, after they had operated to straighten her legs, ankles and feet. I was about 10 or 11 years old. Drummond simply asked me to talk to him about the experience and, in this sharing, I discovered a new connection between my personal experience of the 1960s and the performance, *My year with Donald Trump*. I said, 'Seeing Ruth on her bed in callipers, I realised that I was unable to help her, powerless in every-way to fix her, and I decided then, in that moment, a) life wasn't fair, and b) if I couldn't fix her, I'd fix everything else'.

This response can be understood in the context of disability in the 1950s. Indeed, unknowingly, as a small child in that decade I was, and the family was, subjected to the prevalent medical model of disability of the time. This focused exclusively on the individual person and asserted that disability is an identity conclusion. By identity conclusion, I mean that certain assumptions, expectations or claims are considered permanent and immutable. An identity conclusion, by its linear nature, excludes certain other possibilities for living. One central family narrative I inherited, that epitomises an identity conclusion, relates that the specialist Consultant Paediatrician said to my parents, 'Mr. and Mrs. Cohen, I suggest that you put Ruth in a home for spastics, forget about her, and go home and have another baby': a sentiment that was profoundly and absolutely rejected by my parents. Conversely, the social model of disability that emerged some thirty years later

involves nothing more or less fundamental than a switch away from focusing on the physical limitations of particular individuals to the way the physical and social environments impose limitations upon

certain groups or categories of people. (Oliver and Sapey, 1999 [1983]: 21)

It argues for a fundamental shift in societal thinking and removal of the social barriers that inhibit possibility for people with a disability.

However, sociologists Pamela Fisher and Dan Goodley propose an alternative to these two established perspectives, called *the narrative of challenge*, which is relevant to this research. Narratives of challenge resist restrictive, linear life models and are empowering 'in developing parents' agency to resist normative and oppressive interpretations of disability' (Fisher and Goodley, 2007: 70). Despite the dominant discourse of the time, this was my mother's position: that people would see the child not the label. However, what is even more significant for this project are the transformational aspects of resurfacing these realisations. In that moment of rehearsal, I understood how these two old, entrenched perspectives were continuing to shape my life, influence my choices and impede numerous areas of my personal potential. I was able to recognise again/anew how tightly the grip of the past persists and shapes my present. Indeed, I was able to grasp that spontaneous moment and take it into a period of self reflection and, using Moreno's description of the *est* process (see Chapter One), to 'experience it out' and loosen the grip of the story.

The story of my relationship with my sister, became pivotal to the development of this stage of the piece. Indeed, it was particularly poignant, because this period of devising, collaborating and rehearsing was only days and short weeks after my mother had died, quite suddenly. Drummond astutely observed that, now that my mother had passed-away, my relationship with my sister would probably change; that for most of my life it was likely that I 'had been expected to be the kind of brother my mother expected me to be'. This might have been a sacrifice, or come at a cost, and now my relationship could be based on my own free

choice. I carried these considerations and possibilities iteratively back into the devising process.

I continued to concentrate on specific memories and stories of times, places, people and events of the 1960s. The most overriding and consistent political narrative of the time was the constant and dominant discourse of possible annihilation that circulated during that entire decade. From the thirteen-day Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, through the Atom Bomb tests, to the Vietnam War, thermo-nuclear power was an invisible, ubiquitous threat to society's survival. There was an ensuing everyday angst (dread) that shaped the experience, the ideas, the responses and the ideals of a generation, particularly those born post-World War 2, between 1945 and 1955. It was obvious to me at the time that the future existence of the entire planet often hinged on a US president's knowledge, judgement and temperament. This sensation led quite rapidly to a series of tightly connected associations. First to remembering a haunting sixties protest song about the bombing at Hiroshima called *I Come and Stand at Every Door* (Seeger, 1962), told from the point of view of a child who died in the atomic attack at the age of seven.<sup>29</sup> Then, I connected this to the song *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall* (Dylan, 1963) and I pictured using the sound that a rain-stick makes to conjure the sound of the devastation, ash and crumbling bones, and then to the significance bells often have, symbolizing a wake-up call or indicating an emergency, or the coming of an important announcement. All these began to find their place *in the new script (the script of the performance can be found as Appendix One to the thesis)*.

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<sup>29</sup> The original poem was written in Turkish by Nazim Hikmet in 1956 and was translated into English by Jeanette Turner. The music is drawn from the traditional British folk song *The Great Silkie* and was adapted by Pete Seeger in 1962.



Figure 3. *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump*, performed at the University of Plymouth, PEP Research Group, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017. The drum, and the bamboo poles on the floor, can be seen.

Weaving together all of the elements I have described above, I devised and rehearsed a new piece that lasted about 15 minutes (see Figure 3 above). It has an entirely different feel and texture to anything I have done before. It is precise, far slower, stiller and quieter; far more personal and transparent. The aesthetic (mode of expression) is simple and basic; it fuses Black Box Theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, with Rough Theatre and the ‘torn up sheet pinned across the hall’ as director Peter Brook describes it (1968: 73); the piece involves some of the simplest, earliest aspects of Grotowski’s Poor Theatre, such as simple lighting and no elaborate costumes, ‘fake noses or pillow stuffed bellies’ nor anything else the actor has to put on in the dressing room (Grotowski, 2002: 20). It used sound, song, text and movement.



Figure 4. Screen shot of *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump*, performed at the University of Plymouth, PEP Research Group, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017. I am seen here holding a moment of ritual silence

I used small pieces of card with key words written on them, which I dropped onto the floor after they were spoken to indicate the transience of time; at the close of the performance, they remained scattered on the ground, some within the lines of the bamboo poles, others outside, signifying the narrowness of the bridge of life (related to the lyrics of one song I had sung during the performance). My piece acknowledged the presence of the audience in a simple way, by handing them the instruments to hold, and to give or take from me during the performance. It attempts to raise their awareness of their relationship to some of the crises we are facing and how we are all complicit in their presence, their impact and

their danger. As a solo performance, it strives to connect (my) auto/biography, (my) family narrative, and (my) experiences of the 1960s with the contemporary concerns of the times.



Figure 5. Screen shot of *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump*, performed at the University of Plymouth, PEP Research Group, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017. I am seen here ringing the bell and reciting a list of dates.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed in brief the practitioners whose work underpins the thinking and practice involved in this research project. I have described my first attempt at performance in *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* and the foundation it provides for the development of this inquiry. I have illustrated how Grotowski and Ken Campbell each have a

highly distinctive, unmistakable, theatre style and how I have briefly, experimented with both with varying degrees of success.

Throughout the chapter I have begun to illustrate how my earliest solo performances attempted to return to my teenage years and experience and to weave my personal stories of place and time, family narratives and social discourse and to demonstrate how they all played a part in shaping my self-perception, and my beliefs about the world in which I was living and growing up and with which I was interacting. Engaging in and immersing myself in Practice as Research in these early stages reveals how approaching the same auto/biography (my story, my history, my memories) using different theatrical methodologies - Campbell's seemingly chaotic bricolages and Grotowski's more structured, ceremonial montage and inner focused Action - can lead to or surface different memories, or indeed different sorts of memories. By different sorts of memories, I simply mean memories that are familiar and more easily remembered, contrasted with memories that are unconscious and unexpectedly 'triggered' and which have the potential to produce surprising new insights or understandings and can lead to a re-authoring of old narratives. I believe that part of the reason I experienced *1966* as an unsuccessful performance was because I was drawing almost entirely on memories that were familiar, often repeated and shared, which left little space for any experience of self-transformation. It was not until Drummond's intervention that new and unexpected memories surfaced and catalysed a new perspective on my personal history and familial experience.

Through these early performances I have come to understand how crucial rehearsal and preparation are to self-transformation through solo auto/biographical theatre. The preparatory process, and use of different theatrical approaches, clearly provide the



opportunity to develop precision, specificity, and intentionality, but also take the performer out of their everyday comfort zone, out of the habitual and known, and into new thinking-territory. In this realm of new thinking, different prompts catalyse different images, and it becomes possible for the performer to practice destabilising their own identity, to start to let go of their story. In my own case to weave stories of place and home, times of distress and confusion, and other times of uprising and protest, significant events and momentous circumstances, into new patterns and combinations that allow me to look at my history from different angles, embrace new and different ways of making sense of my past and tell my story in such a way as it makes the familiar exotic both for me and the audience. Rehearsing allows the performer time to distinguish, by which I mean highlight or forefront, and take ownership of their interpretation of events. The rehearsals are the space to develop the character they will play, who will appear on stage in front of the audience and reclaim these new narratives of possibilities.

The rehearsals allow the 'hooks' in the performance to emerge and be recognised. By hooks, I mean the elements of the stories and narratives I choose to include and to share, the events I recount and how I combine and re-combine words and phrases with movements, gestures, pauses and silences - in novel ways that will engage (grab, capture, transport) the audience. The move from *1966* in which I used old LP's, magazines, books and photographs to tell my story, to *State of the Union*, where I used musical instruments, songs and a far more concentrated, poetic text is an example of such a reconfiguration. I have come to understand and appreciate that while the transformational moment is not dependent on others - it can certainly happen in a moment of solitude - it is facilitated by the presence of others, in dialogue with others, between one-another. I have come to recognise that in performing the actor enters into a heightened state of awareness and perception. The rehearsals may not

necessarily teach the performer to 'read' the audience, but they free them to do so. When the performer is prepared and confident, and the sense of risk is minimal, and there is no feeling of impending danger or threat, they do not have to give conscious attention to, or focus on, remembering the text, nor to any of the other elements of their performance. In this state of readiness-to-perform the performer's sensitivity to surrounding stimuli is heightened, they are able to read the audience, gauge how their stories are being received and as Russell suggests (section 2.2.2.) whether the audience is 'becoming' part of their life, and a virtuous circle is created. The audience is watching, reading and responding to the performer, the performer is aware of, and is reading the audience, and a communication/transmission of intention and purpose occurs. These themes will underpin the next part of the research.

## CHAPTER THREE - RETURNING

### 3.1 Introduction

In 1972 the Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh wrote a play, protesting the war in Vietnam, which he entitled *The Path of Return Continues The Journey*.<sup>30</sup> Pearson and Shanks, in a practice that combines archaeology and performance, suggest that returning to a place, and the triangulation of location, encounter, and documentation, can give rise to such (unassuming) questions as: How do you visit [...] What do you do there? How do you tell others? (2014: 201). Moreover, Grotowski states

I don't speak with you as with an author whose work I will stage, but I speak with you as with my great-grandfather. That means I am in the process of speaking with my ancestors. And, of course, I am not in agreement with my ancestors. But at the same time, I can't deny them. They are my base; they are my source. It's a personal affair between them and me (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 294)

Returning, in the context of transformation, is a step towards the future that continues one's personal journey; it is not simply an act that describes the past, but re-collects memories (re-members), in order to liberate possibilities that were previously undiscovered.

This chapter is about returning: to events of my past, places of my past, and to people who knew me well in my past. I also return to the work and ideas of Martin Buber which I had studied in the 1980s. These returns lead to specific new realisations and understandings that coalesce around the potential of a performer 'meeting' their audience and the occurrence of what Buber calls an 'encounter' (Buber, 1958 [1937]: 11). Through an analysis of my

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<sup>30</sup> *The Path of Return Continues the Journey* by Thich Nhat Hanh's was published in an English translation by Hoa Binh (Peace) Press in 1972, with a foreword by the pacifist, American Jesuit priest and anti-war activist, Daniel Berrigan.

performance, *Untitled Work*, in Israel in 2018 the chapter includes an investigation of practices of relationship, space and place and how they interact between performer and audience in solo auto/biographical theatre. I describe my attempts to build on my earlier performances and to be more deliberate in setting up an encounter with my audience. I examine whether or not the performance fulfilled its intentions to create connection and encounter. By analysing my performance and exploring the stories I chose to tell and how I delivered them, I consider which practices were effective in evoking meeting and encounter, which were not, and in which ways. In tracing practical and philosophical research into place, Jewishness and audience, this chapter also analyses the role of spirituality in solo auto/biographical theatre and considers how Martin Buber's notion of the *I-Thou* relationship - meeting and encounter - can occur through and in performance.

The Jewish philosopher and cultural critic, Walter Benjamin, wrote a short piece entitled 'Excavation and Memory', in which he suggested that

He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the 'matter itself' is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights. (Benjamin, 1999: 576).<sup>31</sup>

In my practice, solo performance is an on-going process for inquiring into the auto/biographical 'matter itself'; it is literally designed to yield (reveal) new images of the future that can stand alone under scrutiny, independent of what the past might predict. In 2018, at the age of almost 70, I had a unique opportunity to dig into and return to my own past and to discover my own treasures (possibilities). As an integral part of this research

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<sup>31</sup> *Excavation and Memory* was originally written in German circa. 1932 and was unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime.

project, I returned to Israel with the specific intention of performing auto/biography in front of a group of 50 or 60 people who had known me, closely, as a teenager. Reflecting on this experience, in this chapter, I figuratively scatter the earth of fifty years, turn over the soil and explore the matters of place, return, encounter, and the centrality of my Jewish experience to my development and understandings of solo auto/biographical theatre as a transformative experience.

Return in Judaism is called Teshuvah. It is one of its central, most important values. Return implies taking stock in and of ourselves, of examining our actions and our motivations, acknowledging where our actions have 'missed the mark' or gone astray. By Returning we restore ourselves to a state of being One, whole and complete. This is why Teshuvah is often translated as atonement.<sup>32</sup> Teshuvah, atoning or repenting any sins (missing-the-mark) we may have committed, invites God's forgiveness. In this way Teshuvah restores the human being's relationship to self, to right living and to/with God. Teshuvah is a personal choice and can happen at any time and is always accompanied by a renewed commitment not to repeat the misdeed.

This chapter illustrates Heddon's statement that 'the politics of place are as complex as the politics of identity and the two are in fact related' (2008: 88), as it interlaces place and identity, history, personal and familial narrative, with memory and social, cultural and political upheaval. It is more holographic than linear, more poetic than assertive. Just as each part of a hologram contains all the information about the complete whole, each element of this chapter is connected with, influences, affects, shapes and is in the background to every other part. By poetic, here I am following British poet and critic Robert Sheppard's description of

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<sup>32</sup> The online etymological dictionary [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com) suggests that atonement in the 1500s meant to be in harmony, agree, be in accordance, from the adverbial phrase *atonen* (c. 1300) in accord, or literally 'at one' a contraction of at and one and may derive from earlier Latin also meaning at one.

poetics as ‘the products of the process of reflection upon writings, and upon the act of writing, gathering from the past and from others, speculatively casting into the future’ (n.d.: unpaginated).

Heddon places the contemporary rise of interest in autobiographical performances squarely within the current times of testimony and trauma (2008: 53-87).<sup>33</sup> However, she suggests that the undertaking of psychoanalytic psychotherapy is not always the most appropriate framework for handling painful events as it remains private rather than ‘operating within the realm of a public politics’ (2008: 57). Tuan suggests that ‘[p]lace is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other’ (1977: 3). This is certainly resonant with my personal experience. Indeed, I know about myself that I am shaped through all manner of emplaced memories and experiences, some joyous and some traumatic. Performing in Israel, my site of longing, and indeed of some of my own painful experiences, to an audience who were intimately connected to me, and to the land and the history of Israel, provided a space to explore solo auto/biographical theatre as the simultaneous location for both a shared experience with the audience, and a potential personal transformation.

### **3.2 Place**

American sociologist Jennifer Cross delivered a paper in 2001, describing the attachments people in Northern California feel towards their county of residence. She writes that people can have both a relationship, or bond, with a place and an attachment to a place; she

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<sup>33</sup> The scope and length of the dissertation prevents a full exploration of trauma and how performance can be used in releasing traumatic experiences.

distinguishes between the different types of bonds that exist between people and place, and the different depths of attachment they may experience to that place (2001: unpaginated). She names six types of relationship to a place, which include four that are particularly pertinent to this research project: *biographical*, *narrative*, *ideological* and *spiritual*.<sup>34</sup> In Cross's taxonomy, attachment can range from strong to weak, where strong is described as a sense of rootedness and involvement and weak is an experience of alienation, dissatisfaction and displacement (2001: unpaginated). A biographical relationship often originates by being born in a place. Alternatively, Cross suggests, it can be developed through a long residence, or personal history, with a place, and a consequent strong sense of identification with that place.

### **3.2.1 Biographical Relationships**

*Biographical relationships* to place require time to develop and are strongest in communities in which people have spent more time. Cross reports that interviewees described their relationships to place in terms of cognitive, physical, and emotional connections (Cross, 2001: unpaginated). I was born in Haifa in Israel, (I write below about my relationship to this city). However, my most powerful biographical relationship is with Kibbutz Machanayim, in the Upper Galilee of Israel.<sup>35</sup> It is forever shaped by the almost ten years (between 1970 and 1979) that I lived there, married there, conceived my first child there and created an enterprise there that continues to have national prominence, thirty years later (an international folk music club and festival, see images below). This is the place where my adult

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<sup>34</sup> The other two are commodified and dependent.

<sup>35</sup> An explanation of what a kibbutz is can be found in Appendix Two.

identity was forged. Despite the passage of time and physical distance, this sense of attachment remains strong.



Figure 6. Left to right: Morris (nee Moshé) Cohen, Menachen (previously Martin) Vinograd; Yigal Sela (previously Phillip Senator Lipman). The co-founders of Jacob's Ladder, in the mid 1970s, in the original folk club on Kibbutz Machanayim.





Figure 7. Morris (Mo) Cohen opening the first Jacobs Ladder Folk Festival on Kibbutz Machanayim summer 1978. The festival remains integral to my relationship with Kibbutz Machanayim.

### 3.2.2 Personal Reflections on Place

*I read recently that researchers working at the frontiers of science have found that mammals, including human beings, have a sixth sense.<sup>36</sup> They call it magnetoreception, which is akin to an inner compass. It allows them to sense the earth's electro-magnetic field. This faculty gives beings of all kinds an innate ability to sense both direction and location and to know where they are. It allows them to find their way back home and feel their moment of arrival. The scientists say it's corroborated but unproven ... either way I know this phenomenon. I feel it in my body every time I return to the North of Israel.*

*From the moment the train from Tel Aviv (which is in the centre of the country) begins to journey around the Bay of Haifa (in the North of the Land) and*

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<sup>36</sup> McTaggart reports that the quantum physicists Heisenberg and Bohr 'discovered something so counterintuitive and bizarre about the physical world that many modern physicists, imbued with Newtonian physics, continue to have difficulty accepting it: that *there is no such thing as a thing*, no underlying solid reality, but *only the space between* the indivisible relationships between things' (McTaggart, 2011: 10, my emphasis). Indeed, this is how I continue to experience my relationship with Israel; that despite all considerations of distance and time I know intuitively and instinctively that I am connected to the land, my roots are in the land and that it is home. The *grip* this knowledge has on me, the inner conflicts it creates in my experience and my being is one of the elements of my life that stands out for transformation.

*towards the city of Haifa (where I was born), and Mount Carmel, (which dominates the landscape), appears out of the train window, I start to feel a magnetic pull to the Bahai Temple and the Rothschild Hospital where my mother gave birth to me in 1949. They sit beside each other no more than 1500 meters apart. This feeling is not imaginary; it is an entire physiological sensation unlike any other sensation, feeling or emotion I experience in my life. Indeed, it is not an emotion or an affect at all - it is completely and wholly a physical pull, a corporeal attraction. Over the years I have called it magnetic, I have described it as a sense of coming home, a feeling of returning to source. I know this is real and actual - it occurs; it is palpable - it is experienced. It is both physical and physiological - it happens in my body as sensations and stimulation. Even as I write about it, I experience tears, sadness, a sense of loss and dislocation; an accompanying feeling or sense of bereavement and being dispossessed. Indeed, the etymological source of being bereaved is to have been robbed, seized or taken away by violence. The story my parents tell is that they were forced (by circumstances, not marauders) to leave Haifa when I was about ten days old. Israel was still in a state of war - there was an armistice but no peace agreement with the surrounding Arab countries. I feel that this place is etched on my psyche and on my soul.*

*I believe etymologically the word 'remember' derives from the idea of recalling things back to the mind, while a more 'folk' etymology says to re-member is to bring body parts back together, the opposite of 'dismember'. One perspective locates memory in the mind, the other places memory firmly in the body. My experience of returning to Haifa is even more than just my mind and body. It is body-heart-mind experience. I have sensations I can only describe as longing. I have pictures in my mind that link me to the hospital and the temple (see Figures 6 and 7 above); I have feelings that stretch out and connect me to the mountain and the sea, to the hospital, the temple and its golden dome. In some inexplicable way, the temple and the hospital the mountain and the sea are melded, as-one.*



Figure 8. Eidetic memory #1 - The Bahai Temple on the side of Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel circa 1949. The spiritual centre of the Bahai faith - Mount Carmel is a holy place for Jews and Bahai, Haifa is considered a sacred city by the Bahai. The temple is open to all.



Figure 9. Eidetic memory #2 Maternity Ward, Rothchild Hospital, Haifa, Israel, about 1400 meters from the Bahai Temple. In 1949 the hospital had only 85 beds. Bahai faith envisages Houses of Worship being surrounded by other institutions dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits.

### 3.3 Narrative Relationships

*Narrative relationships* stem from the stories, myths, legends, tales, family histories and political accounts individuals both hear and tell about home or other influential places (2001: unpaginated). As bell hooks poetically reflects about her grandmother Baba, in her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place*:

Baba loved to tell her stories. And I loved to hear them. She called me Glory. And in the midst of her storytelling, she would pause to say, 'Glory, are ya listenin'? Do you understand what I'm telling ya?' (2009: 138).

These narratives teach people about the history, culture and attributes of that place, and of their personal relationship to it. Each of these 'tellings' plays a role in establishing and maintaining the person's relationship to the place in question. For example, my father was born in Liverpool and raised in Southport, Lancashire. I have only ever holidayed there, visiting aunts, uncles and cousins. Yet I have a highly developed connection to both these places based on the reminiscences, recollections, anecdotes, poetry and newspaper articles I heard at family gatherings, both at times of celebration and of mourning.

### 3.4 Spiritual Relationships

Cross suggests that *spiritual relationships* to place are based on something much less tangible than personal history (2001: unpaginated). Her interviewees reported experiencing an intuitive or spiritual connection to place. This could be a very specific, small-scale place such as a lake or a rock, or a much larger scale place such as a geographical region. These relationships are experienced as significant and profound and are described as comprising a deep sense of belonging or resonance that is difficult to articulate in language or words. They

are described as psychic or mystical connections. These may occur unexpectedly and seem to be more of an intuitive or sensed connection than an emotional, cognitive, or material connection (Cross, 2001: unpaginated).

### 3.5 Ideological Relationships

Finally, Cross suggests that *ideological relationships* are founded on conscious values, beliefs and choices about why and how to live in a place (2001: unpaginated). This may consist of political, religious or spiritual teachings, or a more secular ethic of social or environmental responsibility. The concept of ideology is commonly used to describe any broad and generally cohesive set of political ideas and values held by an individual that shape their orientation to society. It is also used to describe an official set of beliefs and ideas associated with a political system, e.g., socialism, feminism or racism. Cultural theorist and literary critic Raymond Williams defines ideology as ‘the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group’ (Williams, 2015 [1976]: 110). Heddon hints that auto/biographical performance may be informed ideologically when she states that as a form it is ‘a useful tool in the struggle for emancipation, equal rights, recognition’ (2008: 20). My choice to become a member of a kibbutz (a Zionist-Socialist communal village) for ten years was certainly ideological. Indeed, this ideological stance and belief in socialist values continues to inform and be reflected in my practice and in my performances. For further details about the kibbutz system see Appendix Two.

While Cross undertook her study from a sociological perspective, Mike Pearson develops an approach to the practice and study of performance which integrates people, place, memory and performing (Pearson, 2006: 4). Like Cross, he acknowledges the emotional



and affective connections between people and place and concurs that these may be primarily aesthetic and tactile and may vary in intensity and expression. In Pearson's terms, Machanayim (even more than Haifa) is my embodied 'one square mile' which Pearson defines as the 'intimate landscape of our earliest years, that terrain we know in close-up, in detail, in a detail we will never know anywhere again' (Pearson, 2006: 23). Tuan writes that these types of affective connections might be expressed as 'a delight in the feel of air, water, earth' (1974: 93), but adds that '[m]ore permanent and less easy to express are feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a living' (1974: 93).

I expressed my feelings of homecoming in an early draft of the script for my first solo performance, *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* (2010), in this excerpt:

*For me, there is a sound that is specifically Israel. I hear it in the unexpected summer thunderstorms at night rolling in from the Mediterranean. I hear it in the song of the birds in the morning calling from ancient Olive and Carob trees, and in the wind as it blows across the valleys and whips and bends the Eucalyptus. It is held in the bamboo and the rocks and the hills, the old chalk quarries, rock-tombs and wine presses. It is in the palms and the plants and the people.*

*The sound of modern Israel is brash and fast and loud. As soon as the plane lands safely the sound of Israel fills the cabin. The passengers grow loud, become the single sound of Israel. It is true, yes, that they spoke Hebrew throughout their trip, while they were abroad, but the Hebrew they spoke was devoid of the sound of Israel. It is as if the language is spoken in whispers and in secret. Abroad the language is hollow and empty.*

*There is a certain energy that changes in the air in Israel. I feel it as we journey out of the airport and it rises, the further into the country I travel. History travels with me. The story of Israel collides with my personal story. My past and its past meet. Buber says, 'All real living is meeting'.*

*My own story greets each stone, each tree, each village, wadi, hill and valley as a passing friend. I have walked these paths before. I notice what is there and what is no longer there, what is missing, what has changed over the past five years, twenty-five years, thirty-five years. Names from the past raise ghosts. Carmi from Beit Keshet whom I first met in France, Baruch from Kadoori, who was my guardian when I first arrived and settled here. Blond Yardena from Mei Ami who seduced me over a game of Scrabble. And I stop short of calling up the Spirits of the Dead. And there is a soul to Israel. It is ancient and modern and everlasting. I felt it this year more than ever before.*

*It was the soul of the land and the landscape, the soul of the country, and it reached up and touched my soul too. I remember, and I do not remember; it has changed, and it is the same.*

*There is also a spirit that is alive in Israel. I taste it at breakfast, in the shakshuka and the tahina, in the olives and in the cheese. It is a wild, spicy, racy spirit. It is the indomitable spirit that lets cotton grow in rocky fields, and orange groves flourish on swampland, and avocados grow on stony ground. It is the ancient spirit of grapes and wine and music and dance, of trade paths and spice routes of explorers, adventurers and pioneers.*

*I saw it echo in the laughter of the children and the smiles of their eyes. Children who are raised to survive and defend themselves but not to hate their neighbours.*

*Love thy neighbour as thy self. All the rest is commentary said Rabbi Hillel, when asked to explain the essence of Judaism while standing on one leg.*

*Amen. Let it be so.*

These personal experiences are echoed and reflected in the words of Mike Pearson. He asserts that when we engage in 'the scrutiny' of the lived experiences of land, and its interrelationship with performance and everyday living, and inquire into the entangled nature of land, human subject and event, we begin to recognise the close link between culture, subjectivity and place. He observes that there is a complex relationship between ourselves, our bodies, and our environment. He notes that there is an important connection between our physical and sensual experience of place, and the impact a particular location can have on our lives (Pearson, 2006: 4).

### **3.6 Rehearsals for a Return**

As Margherita Laera writes

Theatre returns, it always does. It returns to places where it has already been before and to times in which it has already appeared [...] Theatre also rewrites. It constantly does. It rewrites history, relationships, stories and rules. It refashions beliefs, recycles old and used objects and reassembles them into new embodied experiences. (Laera, 2014: 1)

My performance in 2018, at the age of 69, was to take place in the context of a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion of participants from a Jewish / Zionist youth leadership programme held in Jerusalem,<sup>37</sup> called the *Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad* (in Hebrew: *Ha'Machon le'Madrichei Chutz L'Aretz* - it was colloquially referred to as *Machon*, and the participants as *Machonnickim*). This was the first time we had met since we completed the course in June 1969. Many of us had not seen or spoken to each other in 50 years. In the history of the Institute, our intake (43<sup>rd</sup>) has a reputation of being exceptional. It was the only group at the time to come from both Northern and Southern Hemispheres (from Australia to Canada), but more particularly for its intimacy, affinity and loyalty.

In the months prior to the reunion, I had been revising and refining my performance, *My Year with Donald Trump*, about which I wrote in the last chapter. I had rehearsed an expanded, more auto/biographical version with the director Mark Drummond until I left for Israel, and it was ready to be shown. However, unexpectedly, the organisers of the reunion, where I was scheduled to perform, took a decision that there would be no political presentations during the event (to ensure what is traditionally called in Judaism, *sh'lom bayit* - that is, 'peace in the house' or harmony), and so Drummond and I discussed ways that the performance could raise issues without alienating any of the participants in the reunion who might hold opposing views to my own (about Trump or Israel-Palestine). I took this expanded, adapted and inclusive version of the performance with me to Israel to rehearse and perform at the reunion.

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<sup>37</sup> Zionism is the Jewish National Liberation Movement that supports the continuation of Israel as an independent Jewish State. Modern Zionism emerged in the late 19th century in Central and Eastern Europe as a national revival movement, particularly in reaction to continued pogroms and waves of antisemitism. Movements of National Liberation stand for the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty; other National liberation movements for example have included the American separatists who fought the British for independence, the India Self-Rule Movement, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, ETA the Basque Liberation Group, The IRA in Ireland, The ANC in South Africa, and many others.



Immediately prior to the reunion I spent three weeks in Israel, mostly with my brother and his family in their village, Ma'aleh Zvia, in the Western Galilee. Like a kibbutz, this is an intentional community,<sup>38</sup> but it is not socialist nor is it a commune. It is nevertheless a community with shared principles, which follows the beliefs of a non-denominational, spiritual foundation called the Emin.<sup>39</sup> It is a very special, tranquil place. Here, in this serene location, the combination of the physical environment, the affective atmosphere, the family discussions, the conversations with other friends and residents, and the community activities we took part in, all provided a backdrop and a context for my thinking, reading, research, my practice, the rehearsals, my performance and the on-going process of discovery.

Misri Dey notes that Bobby Baker describes dramatic, visionary instances of knowing that arrive in a *sonic 'Boom'* moment (2015: 197). In Israel, the sound of shells falling are also booms; they are called *boomim* ('im' is the masculine plural in Hebrew). The first night we arrived in Israel was on the day that President Donald Trump announced he was pulling the US out of the Iran agreement and political and military turbulence was conspicuous in Syria. Israel was on high alert for a potential rocket attack and the entire country was 'on edge' (dreading, distressed, disquieted). Indeed, the whole of the Middle East was 'on edge'. There was a sense that an all-out war might be looming, and the public bomb shelters were re-opened. Throughout our first night, the *booms* of the shelling could be heard in the distance.

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<sup>38</sup> An intentional community is a planned residential community designed from its inception to have a high degree of social cohesion. Typically, residents or members of the community share a political spiritual or religious vision and set of values. They are aligned around a particular lifestyle.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Emin is an ongoing exploration and endeavour to respond to the summons of the times in which we live and the urgent need we feel, in common with many others, to reclaim our lives to their natural purpose. The Emin has been pioneered and maintained as an open and unfinished philosophy of life and living for over 30 years. The Emin gives rise to new and original templates for discovery and understanding across many fields of timeless human preoccupation and study. This template pattern offers a variety of frameworks for the personal and spiritual development of the inner and future life and facilitates a natural education in the practical and purposeful arts of living. There is no organisation or society called 'The Emin'. Individuals, who share the same philosophical foundations, meet together in independent template networks in many countries, as well as internationally, in companionship for the exchange of ideas and discoveries' (Welcome to the Emin Website, n.d.: unpaginated).

Iranian forces in Syria were attacking Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights, perhaps 25 or 30 miles away. Depending on different conditions sound can travel up to 200 miles. These *boomim* went on all night. Israel utilised the missile defence system known as *The Iron Dome*, designed to explode shells in the air before they landed. I was born only one year after Israel's war of independence, in a country that had no peace treaties with its neighbours. I returned in 1967 as a volunteer in the 6-Day War. I had been under fire in the 1973 Yom Kippur war. And now it felt once again that I had returned to a theatre of conflict.



Figure 10. Red pin shows where we were staying.

The period leading up to the *Machon* Reunion consisted of an intense stretch of rehearsing. It included several long walks I took around the village with my brother, during which I read through the complete text, and a scratch performance for my wife, brother, and sister-in-law; each time receiving useful observations, comments and feedback, and making adjustments both to the text and how successfully I was performing it. The scratch performance took about an hour. I let the organiser of the reunion talks know how long it lasted and was told I was not allocated that amount of time. So, I had to edit the script again, what Drummond calls in our rehearsals together 'a radical concentration'. I stripped out most

of the original 'theatrics' that were wrapped around the political elements, including the drum, the rain-stick and the bell, and the accompanying overtly political text.

At this point, I was still planning to sing and use the bamboo bridge as mise-en-scene to structure and arrange the performance. I did a dress rehearsal for the family; I got one third through and my brother called time - I had reached my allocated twenty minutes. I was therefore forced to re-edit. I realised that there was no conceivable way I could explain the passage of 50 years in twenty minutes, therefore I reluctantly took out the poles I had cut especially for the performance, dropped most of the songs I had been performing and decided to ponder the question that was paramount to my thinking at that point: 'What would it mean to me if I lived a life of spiritual and artistic integrity?' Thus, Richard Schechner's description of Grotowski that he was 'spiritual and artistic integrity incarnate' (Schechner, 2001a: xxviii) became the focus of the last stage of the rewriting, refining and rehearsing. In attempting to answer this question in performance, my intention was to update people about who I had become over the past fifty years.

I pondered on how this was possible. Richard Sennett explains that pondering is more than simply another word for thinking. It involves taking things slowly, dwelling in a question, giving birth to ideas, letting go of thoughts and allowing new options to appear, noticing and exploring (Sennett, 2008). This is equally true for myself; I wrote in my reflective journal during the trip that

*walking the track between the hills surrounding the village provided the opportunity to dramatically slow down and reflect on the performance material. Indeed, the act of walking, reading out loud and thinking created a profound sense of rootedness and connection with the land itself.* (Reflective Journal, 2018)

Land, location, site, place and memory all combined to shape the content and process of the performance.

A direct outcome of this *slowing down* was a rise in the amount of time available for reading - in particular, the writings of Martin Buber, which I include as a part of my rehearsal process. Reading and returning to Buber in Israel, in the spiritual environment of Ma'aleh Zvia, I experienced the hallowing of everything which set up my intentions for the performance I was making. Indeed, this reiterative process of readjusting back into Israeli culture and politics, dwelling on the land and in ideas, pondering, slowing down and rehearsing all contributed to an overall experience of return (see Appendix Five).

### **3.7 Martin Buber, Jewishness, and Encounter**

In a 2016 paper Jenn Stephenson writes that

Encounter between 'I' and 'You' is a central feature of autobiographical performance as the performer attempts to communicate an intimate sense of what it means to be a particular self to a second-person assemblage of curious witnesses. Ostensibly, the intention is that through this performative encounter, knowledge is imparted and the stranger becomes less strange. (2016: 1)

Martin Buber (1878-1965) is a Jewish philosophical anthropologist who is considered 'a contested figure' (Mendes-Flohr, 2019: xvii), often more appreciated by Christian theologians than Jewish academics and intellectuals. Like many of the questions Grotowski asked later, 'the questions Buber was trying to answer were the most ineffable ones of human life: What is the meaning of our existence? How can we achieve the feeling of wholeness that we so painfully lack?' (Kirsch, 2019: unpaginated).

At the heart of Buber's theology is his concept of dialogue: the proposition that what matters is not understanding God in abstract, intellectual terms but, rather, entering into a living relationship with 'this one' (Buber, 1970: 83). Such a relationship, he believed, is possible through genuine (whole, complete) relationships with any other being - human,

animal or natural. Buber describes the relationship that overcomes barriers between people as *I-Thou*. He proposes

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination I-Thou. The other primary word is the combination I-It; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words He and She can replace It. Hence, the I of man is also twofold. For the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It. (Buber, 1958 [1937]: 3)

Buber proposes that *I-Thou* combines as one word indicating a primary way of being (1958 [1937]: 3). The *I-Thou* relationship is a meeting of persons in which each affirms the other with their whole being. It begins with one person adopting an *I-Thou* stance and awakening this in the other who responds reciprocally. Buber calls this *embracing* the other (1970: 178).

*I-Thou* stands in contradiction to *I-It*, also a primary way of being in the world, which is the mundane (earthly, day-to-day) experience of living and being and relating to another person. In the *I-It* relationship, the *I* experiences the Other as separate, 'over-there', one thing among many things. It inevitably leads to a view of people and things as objects to be acquired, categorised, possessed or exploited. When the *I* touches *I-Thou*, however, the *I* touches both self and other as connected and undivided. *I-Thou* is an encounter at the deepest level with humanity, nature, art and existence, an awareness of our oneness with all that is. Moreover, the *I* who speaks *I-Thou*, and touches *I-Thou*, is not the same *I* who speaks and experiences *I-It*. In the *I-Thou* encounter, *I* relates as a whole being to the whole being of the other who is a 'partner in this moment of dialogue' (Gordon, 2001: xiv).

*I-Thou* is not simply a word to describe a relationship. It is also not an experience. Experience belongs to the world of *I-It* (Buber, 1970: 56). Buber argues that 'The improvement of the ability to experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's power to relate'

(Buber, 1970: 92). *I-Thou* is an event. *I* is something that happens. It is something that occurs, which is beyond individual experience. It is something that happens within a relationship, between beings. Buber calls this phenomenon *meeting*; he says, ‘all real living is meeting’ (Buber, 1958 [1937]: 11).<sup>40</sup> In a moment of meeting, an ‘encounter’ arises and/or emerges. *I-Thou* encounter reveals a possibility of human existence that Buber calls a moment of grace. It is an act of pure being which ‘cannot be found by seeking’ (Buber, 1970: 62). For Buber, this is not an abstraction but a religious reality. When an *I-Thou* encounter takes place it reveals ‘traces of the mystery’ (Buber, 1973: 4); by ‘traces of the mystery’ Buber means ‘the inexplicable’ (Buber, 1973: 4), the events for which we have no words, or for which words are inadequate; events or experiences we cannot explain; they are outside our normal frames of reference. At one end of the spectrum this may include trauma and dissociation, at the other end connection, love and enlightenment. For Buber it is a moment of theophany. While most solo auto/biographical performances are not overtly ‘religious’ and take place in a ‘non-religious’ context, in my quest to discover my own sense of spiritual and artistic integrity, developing this capacity to recognise the ‘divine spark’ in the other becomes a key indicator that I am progressing in the right direction, and plays a central role in evoking the spiritual potential of solo auto/biographical performance (Buber, 1950: 5).

Indeed, there is a certain set of personal experiences that cannot be put into or reduced to signs and meanings in performance (Pavis, 1985: 209). Whalley and Miller refer to these ineffable experiences as ‘qualia’ (2017: 58-96). They explain that qualic experiences occur when the ‘power of language is usurped by experience’ and that any attempt to articulate or share the experience reverts simply to being a narrative account. They describe

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<sup>40</sup> Kaufman’s translation is ‘all actual life is encounter’ (1970: 62).

the gap between languaging an experience and the experience itself as a 'territory fraught with uncertainty' (2017: 79). Tye even states that '[s]ome say that the explanatory gap is unbridgeable and that the proper conclusion to draw from it is that there is a corresponding *gap in the world*' (2018: unpaginated, my emphasis). Whalley and Miller hesitate to 'offer the qualic exchange as an opportunity to fall into a gap in the world' (2017: 91). Buber on the other hand, both in my understanding of his writing, and in my embodied experience, suggests that it is through this gap in the world we meet God in an other.

### **3.8 1968 to 2018**

As I indicated in the introduction to the thesis, the intention of my practice is to perform to an audience that is already connected to the performer. This is a central element of my approach to Solo Auto/biographical Theatre, a form which is uniquely 'capable of staging a direct and immediate address to the spectator' (Heddon 2008: 6). At a Solo Auto/biographical Theatre performance each person in the audience can potentially feel themselves personally touched by the performer's story. What can arise thereafter is an immediate sense of reciprocity, whereby members of the audience and the performer can feel included or closely allied in each others' lives, intimately and emotionally wrapped together, creating a sense of unity, within which the performer feels seen, recognised and acknowledged and can experience a sense of belonging to the community.

As I stated previously, in section 0.10, my audiences were invited to bear witness to the performance of transformational aspects of my life story. Now, in 2018, it was important that this audience in Israel were able to bear witness to the performance of certain transformational aspects of my life story. Bearing witness is

not just watching or observing, it is a conscious act of actively engaging with the performer and validating, acknowledging and appreciating the sharing of their self discoveries. Indeed, when a performer is witnessed, a virtuous circle is being created within which the performer offers a perspective that is of value to them, that is meaningful or significant, and the witness is open to receiving that which is offered by the performer, without judgment, empathically and supportively. The witness affirms that which is being spoken or performed in public. In this way the discovery is both shared and amplified. The witness (metaphorically) says '*I see you*', *you are safe here*' and through this process and state of bearing witness, as Heddon suggests, an invisible life, or an invisible aspect of one's life, is relocated from the margins to the centre (2008: 3). Through the act of re-storying (Rouverol 2005: 23) or reauthoring (White, 2007: 62) a new identity is co-created in and through conversation between the performer and their witnesses, which can strengthen and resolve personal agency, and can circulate freshly in the community. This sense of personal agency and resolve is foundational to the sustainability of self-transformation.

In my practice, self-transformation 'lives' in the perception of others as much as it does in ourselves; as Heidegger argues, it is indisputable that self-knowledge arises from relatedness to others (1962: 162). Self-transformation is a reciprocal phenomenon. It 'happens' concomitantly in my own self-awareness and in the awareness of me by others. Self-transformation 'occurs' not only in the story I tell myself about myself, but equally in the stories that others tell about me, to each other, and that circulate within a community. It was important to me that the machon group learned to know me as I was in 2018, at the time of the reunion, not just to *remember* me as an arrogant 19 year old 'show off', who was elitist, exclusive, brash, and



cocksure of himself. I wanted them to know how much that year between 1968 and 1969, with all of them, had meant to me and how important they all were to me, both then and now. Emphatically, I wanted to make amends for any hurt I had caused anyone at that time, which I knew I had. By focussing on the story of my search over the past five decades for my sense of 'spiritual and artistic integrity' I anticipated being able to answer the questions posed by Pearson and Shanks - How do you visit [...] What do you do there? How do you tell others? (2014: 201), and to return to take a step towards the future that would continue my own personal journey of discovery. I foresaw the potential of a genuine meeting with my audience of witnesses, that would accomplish my intentions.

The four-day *Machon* Reunion event, at which I performed was held in a Mediterranean beach hotel, in Northern Israel, just outside the ancient crusader city of Acco. 'The Others' in this case were 40 *Machon* graduates and about 20 partners, husbands and wives; most were English speakers, some French and a few Spanish. Despite the political and religious differences of the group (we ranged the spectrum from left to right and from secular to orthodox Judaism), we shared a common landscape. Informed by comparable (similar but different) Jewish backgrounds, fundamentally we nevertheless all believed in a common way of acting in the world, summed up in the aphorism attributed to Rabbi Hillel: *If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? And, if not now, when?* (*Pirkei Avot*, 1:14)<sup>41</sup> Moreover, it was in 1968, a momentous year of uprising and resistance, that we had first met as a group.

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<sup>41</sup> Pirkei Avot (usually translated as Chapters of the Fathers or Ethics of the Fathers) is a remarkable document. It consists of sayings of Jewish sages who lived from 300 BCE to 200 CE as well as many anonymous sayings. It is one of 63 tractates of the Mishnah and is the most widely known. It was compiled by Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi, in approximately 200 CE.

1968 was a year of ‘public “cataclysmic” historical events’ (Heddon, 2008: 53). It remains both the symbol and the pinnacle of idealistic efforts to bring about social and cultural transformation. Mark Kurlansky called it *The Year That Rocked the World* (2004). It was a year of resistance, of social upheaval and the beginnings of the Women’s Movement. There were demonstrations on the streets and on the university campuses across the UK, Europe, Eastern Europe including Poland, North America and Mexico, and political protests against dictatorships, state repression, colonization and social injustice. Martin Luther King was murdered; US Presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. There were unprecedented violent clashes between protestors and police at the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago. In Paris, students and workers went to the barricades across the city. Someone posted an announcement on the gates of the (University of Paris) Sorbonne on 13<sup>th</sup> May that read: ‘We are inventing a new and original world. Imagination is seizing power’ (Mortimer, 2003 [1968]: unpaginated). My audience and I are part of what is referred to in the common vernacular as *The Baby Boomers*, the post second world war generation born between 1946 and 1955, come to age in a period committed to redefining traditional values. Deleuze sums up the concerns of 1968 in the following questions: ‘What can I do, What do I know, What am I?’ (Deleuze, 1988: 115). These questions are of course central to the issue of self-transformation, and were a key concern in this performance.

The primary element intended to hold my performance together in Israel was the shared experience of the audience over a span of half a century.<sup>42</sup> From a self-story of now, I was attempting to draw the audience’s attention towards a shared passage of time from 1968

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<sup>42</sup> As elsewhere in this thesis, in this section, I draw loosely on Pavis’s questionnaire (1985: 208), as a springboard to analyse my performance in Israel. However, I approach the questions from the perspective of the artist and the maker rather than that of the spectator. Pavis’s first question invites the responder to identify what holds the elements of the performance together.

to 2018. So, for example, as the performance began and I walked through the side door of the room and approached 'the stage' (the front of the room), I said to the audience,

*One of the things that seems to keep happening when I perform is that some unexpected event occurs, and this evening is reminiscent of something that happened at our festival in Devon last year ... which reminded me of a performance by Spike Milligan in the 1960s, just before we came on Machon ...*

In this one, long sentence I am referring to at least four separate occasions in time. In a different way, taking a roll of toilet paper from my backpack had connotations of our desert and wilderness outings and tours as teenagers in 1968 when toilets were infrequent and inadequate, while simultaneously invoking our concern with health and wellbeing as older men and women attending the reunion (see Figures 11 and 12 below showing this passage of time).



Figure 11. 'There are always those who remember us, remember for us, better than we do ourselves' (Pearson, 2006: 22). Photograph from May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1969, showing about a third of Cohort 43 (43 in Hebrew is *Mem-Gimel*) - 1968-69, The Institute for Youth Leaders, Jerusalem. I am top row first left.



Figure 12. Showing the participants on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion of Cohort 43 - Mem-Gimel (43 in Hebrew is *Mem-Gimel*) of the Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad, Jerusalem 1968 -1969, reunion held in Acco, Israel, 29 May 2018. I am bottom row, second right.

Lisa Kron reflects that ‘part of my thing was to perform as if I was just standing there talking to people’ (in Myers, 2015: unpaginated). She is here suggesting how the actor and persona can merge seamlessly on stage, if not into one, at very least into a character the audience receives as congruent and authentic. She also emphasises that she has always been interested in learning how ‘to make an authentic connection with the audience’ (2006: ix). She suggests that when the people watching a performance sense that something is happening on stage that seems out of control, and the rules of theatre that they anticipate are suddenly broken by the players, ‘it makes the audience feel the electricity of something happening right now in this moment’ (Kron, 2006: xi). It is in these intersections, contradictions and conversational detours that Kron believes ‘the traditional performer-audience relationship is subverted [...] and it creates the delicious illusion that anything could happen next’ (2006: xi). In my performance, in front of this particular audience, I was explicitly experimenting with all Kron’s ideas of performance to subvert my companions’ set

expectations of someone they knew well and to try to create an unexpected electricity, immediacy and authentic connection with them. By authentic connection here I simply mean a connection with me (the performer) that is experienced by the audience as a genuine and palpable moment of contact.

As discussed above, my original script had been rewritten in the context of, 'what it would mean to me to live a life of spiritual and artistic integrity', the description Schechner applies to Grotowski. Furthermore, it was written into a format specifically taking into account this audience, picturing who they were for me then in 1968 and now in 2018, and imagining who I had been for them then, and who they were expecting me to be now.<sup>43</sup> When I use the term format, I am referring to the written text I had prepared, not to the visual appearance of the performance. Format is the word Landmark Worldwide applies to any manual that a programme leader studies to deliver a programme or course. Landmark Worldwide Programme Leaders are trained to 'generate themselves from' the format. The format consists of a series of headlines, prompts, reminders, timings and, most importantly, intentions that aim to guide the conversation but not to fix it, in the sense of pre-determine or 'cement' it. The format provides the greatest flexibility for each leader to bring their own life experiences and self expression to the conversation. In other words, the format serves as an ontological springboard from which the leader is expected to distinguish - bring forth, to presence, bring to life - the content, principles, concepts and distinctions of their programme in such a way that leaves the participants 'touched, moved and inspired'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Dey reports that the practitioners she interviewed include picturing as a particular way of thinking that is part of the process of devising (2015: 189).

<sup>44</sup> Distinguish is used in Landmark Worldwide in much the same way as Buber uses the word Transmit to describe the story telling of the Hasidim.

Heddon and Milling report that companies like Forced Entertainment are explicit about the importance of ‘accidents’ in the devising process (2006: 198). Indeed, accident was a primary component of shaping my performance, and I was becoming increasingly confident in trusting it as a primary creative experience. By this, I mean I was able to be unattached (not dependant upon) either the preparation or the text, to be without an expectation that something specific was going to happen, willing for the process to carry me, to ‘go with the flow’ and to ‘be in the moment’. The latter includes being aware, not dwelling on the past or anticipating the future. My goal was to be firmly rooted in the community of the reunion - that is, connected to, belonging in, experiencing a sense of togetherness - drawing on the energy in the room. I was ready to attempt something akin to Spalding Gray’s methodology. He says about his performances, ‘I never memorize my lines. I’m trying to corral them every time. It’s like bushwhacking— I hack my way up the hill each night until eventually I make a clear path for myself. The path sets itself’ (in Schechner, 2002: 166).

This shift from script to format is central to consideration of this performance. By making this shift I was moving from a performance that was more traditionally theatrical - adhering and conforming to a fixed and planned written text, with mimetic and obviously representational or symbolic elements - to something far more ambiguous, and discontinuous. For Lehmann, writing of the post dramatic, this involves

more presence than representation, more shared than communicated  
experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification,  
more energetic impulse than information. (Lehmann, 2006: 85)

To create this shared experience, for example, toward the beginning of my performance I (as if) spontaneously ask the audience, rhetorically, ‘*Who is here? Who is actually here?*’ And I assert, ‘*It’s not us, is it? It is our ghosts ... isn’t it, the ghosts of 1968?*’ The reunion was in my experience, to use Derrida’s phrase, a ‘spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to

time' (2006 [1994]: xix). Paraphrasing the stage instructions from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - enter the ghost, exit the ghost, re-enter the ghost - my text was attempting to invoke a moment of conjuration in which the audience could reconnect to a shared past and connect to each other in the here and now, which would hopefully encourage the possibility of encounter.

Building on my previous performances, drawing again on Grotowski's concept of montage and Campbell's bricolage of diverse elements that unify as a coherent whole, as described in Chapter Two, my format attempted to conflate the past and the present.<sup>45</sup> It consisted of a series of returns or call-backs that relied on playing with time, using a kaleidoscope of memories, summoning up occasions from the past, returning to them and connecting them all to: my doctoral process, my development as a performer, the question I was asking myself, the year programme in 1968 and the reunion in 2018. I was deliberately attempting to establish what I previously referred to as 'narrative wormholes'. Robert McKee, with whom Ken Campbell studied and whose techniques influenced Campbell's development as a monologist (Merrifield, 2011: 340), also employs a returning device he calls *Setups and Payoffs*. He states that 'To set up means to layer in knowledge; to pay off means to close the gap by delivering that knowledge to the audience. When the gap between expectation and result propels the audience back through the story seeking answers, it can only find them if the writer has prepared or planted these insights in the work' (1997: 239).

### 3.9 Setting a Performance Space

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<sup>45</sup> For an example of semi auto/biographical theatre that does this successfully see the memory play *Doc* by Canadian playwright Sharon Pollock (1986).

Rachel Hann suggests that the scenographer is the author of a space of interaction and communication that renders 'a place as eventful' (that is, memorable, exciting, momentous) (2018: 4). Often, in the context of solo performances, the role of performer-creator includes that of scenographer insofar as it is necessary for them to consider the principles of the organisation of their space, both the acting space and the audience space (Pavis, 1985: 209). From a scenographic perspective I believe that the reunion, as a whole, was eventful and that the organising group (wittingly or unwittingly) had recreated the familiar world of the original *Machon*. The place they had chosen for the event was in Acco, in a hotel that echoed the Jerusalem campus in 1968. It had an informal communal dining room for shared meals, adjacent bedrooms, a classroom and a performance hall. Both the *Machon* programme in 1968 and the reunion in 2018 included a 'stretching out' of activities into the wider environs of Israel through trips, outings and excursions. The programme of events during the reunion paralleled the curriculum of the year course, including guided tours, singing and dancing, lectures and talks and informal, unstructured social time. The Machon campus in the suburbs of Jerusalem we had lived in fifty years earlier was vacated shortly after our cohort completed its studies. To the participants of the reunion, had become what Tuan designates a 'mythical space' which represented 'a whole way of looking at the world' (1977: 86). For a second time, after a break of half a century, this unique gathering recreated that world view. The 'space' of the reunion was more than its physical location and place. The hotel became a space infused with a particular culture, atmosphere and ambience; a unique amalgamation of place, time, relationships, values and conversations.

Central to these conversations were the reunion talks. Even though the majority were delivered from 'the front of the room', people in the audience behaved throughout them all as if they were in a far more informal circle or sharing space - commenting, interrupting,



responding, contributing, much like Pearson reports the audience did when he performed *Bubbling Tom* in his home village of Hibaldstow in 2000. He recalls that he was ‘constantly interrupted by others with additions to, and corrections and contradictions of, my story: ‘It wasn’t there, it was there. And it wasn’t you, it was your brother! Says my mother’ (Pearson, 2006: 21). Similarly, highly participatory classes and discussions were the norms of the youth movements in which we had all grown up, and of the *Machon*. Everyone was familiar with them. This allowed for banter, teasing and friendly repartee. Indeed, I would assert that this ongoing familiarity was a crucial component to the sense of belonging, community and affinity that expanded and deepened over the four days of the reunion, and which contributed to a sense of rootedness everyone reported experiencing. Whalley and Miller describe this way of being in an audience as the shift from being a spectator watching the performance, to the experience of ‘being with’ the performer (2017: 117).

I entered not from the front but from the side of the room. Starting from ‘off-stage’, unlike the other talks which had all started in front of the audience, I was signaling that this was a different kind of ‘talk’, and by linking the past and the present I was locating myself both in the here and now, and in the there and then, in 2018 and the 1960s, in London, Devon and Israel. This very brief time span of crossing the room also allowed me to warm up,<sup>46</sup> and ‘find my way into’ the format. I took time to acknowledge the previous performer and link my performance to many of the themes he and others had spoken about - longing and belonging, exile, the ‘imposter syndrome’ (being found out as inadequate or not enough).

This kind of warm up process adds to my sense of freedom and presence. When I perform, I often have an experience of myself as simultaneously both in my body and outside

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<sup>46</sup> By warm up I mean: make the transition from being a spectator to a performer, ground myself and feel present, energise myself and get my body ready to move, relax my body and release any tension, get my voice under control, find the right volume, pitch and pace, to take my focus of attention from me on myself towards the audience, and to make connection.

myself watching myself. The presence of this sensation informs me that things are going off track; its absence grants me being, presence and authenticity. It is like an internal somatic guidance system, in many respects similar to the 'sixth-sense' I wrote about earlier in this chapter. I discuss the qualities of presence and authenticity in more detail in Chapter Four.

I knew my performing space. I knew that it was an interwoven physical site, a social site, an emotional site and a site of dynamic participation. The night before, at the end of the evening when everyone had left the room, I had rearranged the chairs and tables to create an area that was big enough for me to perform in. I had organised a high chair and lectern that I knew I would use. It was not obvious or apparent to anyone else but me that I had prepared a set; it just looked like the hotel had 'cleared up' as they normally would. I made the decision not to change the seating arrangements or the lighting to something more 'theatre-like' with the intention of maintaining community, intimacy and the potential of encounter. Pavis refers to all this 'construction of the staging' and the scenographic preparation, as part of creating the overall spectacle for the audience (1985: 210). While spectacle seems to be antithetical to the concept and experience of encounter 'Guy Spielmann has put forward a theory that recognises the intersubjectivity between performer and spectator' and has proposed the term 'spectation' to signify the reciprocal interchange of thoughts, feelings and shared experience that happens during performance between audience and performer (in Pavis, 2016: 228).



Figure 13. Screen shot showing the author performing *Untitled Work* in Israel 2018. The picture shows me introducing the fact that I have become a student again, learning to become a performer, at the age of 68. The audience knew me originally when I was 19 and just out of high school.

### 3.10 Performing (a) Return

I was giving the twentieth of twenty short talks delivered by reunion participants over the course of three evenings. My performance was scheduled immediately after a seasoned and accomplished professional Canadian actor, Stuart Nemtin, known professionally as clown Major Conrad Flapps, whose talk was very personal and emotional, and - critically for me - intimidating.<sup>47</sup> By the time of my performance the group was already 'running late'. The compere asked the audience whether they would prefer to go to dinner on time and see my performance later that night or see it before dinner and eat late. The audience's immediate response was to start chanting 'We want Mo ...'. I know from previous performances that this

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<sup>47</sup> While I am aware that comparing my relatively novice skills of the time with those of a seasoned performer is not a useful exercise. It was nevertheless extremely palpable in that moment as his performance contained a number of similar elements to my own. In his diary *Year of the King* actor Anthony Sher describes his struggle with the idea of playing Richard III after Laurence Olivier has created possibly the definitive part. Sher's therapist supports him by defining 'normality' as 'a contentment with who you are' (Sher, 1985: 28 and 37). This was my task too at that moment.

is exactly the kind of spontaneous occurrence that catalyses a state of arousal and anticipation in me, that energises me, and facilitates my capacity to improvise, or more accurately to extemporise and be present and in the moment.<sup>48</sup> My experience aligns with research which suggests that heightened states of arousal are correlated with a rise in confidence (Allen et al, 2016: unpaginated). Surprise stimulates me to be creative. It pushes my boundaries beyond my comfort zone and invites me to take risks. The experience of uncertainty gives me something to respond to and it expands my imagination and my intuition. Sennett describes intuition as the sense that ‘what isn’t yet could be’ (2008: 209) and that ‘intuitive leaps’ trigger tacit knowledge and surprise; surprise that something unpredictable, beyond initial assumptions, can occur (2008: 209). The sudden anticipation and imminence of performing transported me into a space of surprise, a state of mind, body and spirit of speculation, invention and wonderment. Tuan suggests that ‘[u]ncertainty and the potential for surprise are characteristics of the future and contribute to a sense of the future’ (1977: 127). Having a sense of agency over one’s future is central to self-transformation. Indeed, Erhard proposes that [w]ho you are and how you act in the present is given by the future into which you are living’ (2006: unpaginated). I experienced this space of surprise as presenting me with a future of creative opportunity.

I hurriedly left the room to centre myself. Voice coach and teacher Patsy Rodenburg writes that being centred is not a mystical experience. It is the sense of feeling free in one’s own being and ‘making that the source’ from which one lives and speaks (1997: 29). After exiting the place of our meeting, I made the return shortly thereafter to my prepared performance space in order to begin. I know now from the feedback I received that this exit

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<sup>48</sup> The etymology of extemporise, meaning ‘in accordance with the needs of the moment, or without time to prepare,’ but now often with a sense merely of without notes, (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2021), is more in accordance with my inner experience than to improvise.

from the room disoriented a number of people in the audience. They were unsure what had been decided about the performance<sup>49</sup>. For example, one audience member wrote to me saying

[...] at first *I was a bit confused* because I had the impression that you had to run and collect your props; there was a question raised in your absence of time though, then a wait time and when you re-entered it seemed as if you hadn't found what you went to gather and were apologizing for the ad hoc nature of what you were about to do. If that was all planned, it was very convincing.

As a performer, I actively search for opportunities to create a sense of 'confusion' in audience members because it can create openings that were not available before. Lisa Kron describes these moments - when the traditional rules of the audience-performer relationship are broken - as dynamic, galvanising and exciting, and 'everyone onstage and off can feel the power of the inter-dependent bond' between them (2006: xi). Another spectator at the Israel reunion wrote:

Your particular technique had stylistic elements of 'performance' (e.g., the raised chair; the string of observations organized by topics; the directed 'conversation' with the audience).

However, that is not to say it was only experienced as a performance. A third member of the audience fed back:

For me, *the talk (and it was, I felt, more of a talk than a performance) seemed not fully formed*. It had an air of spontaneity which was not entirely a good thing because I was not convinced that you knew fully where you were going (my emphasis).

And yet another wrote:

you are a performer, and you performed to your audience, making it seem like theatre.

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<sup>49</sup> I received the feedback, in response to a request I made, by email, after the reunion was over. Both the invitation to provide feedback and the responses I received can be seen in Appendix Four.

Finally, I received this feedback which points to my ultimate aim and intention:

[...] it is your ability to sweep the audience into your life and to see from your eyes that is amazing. I love the way you use clothes, books, and other objects as props.

It is fascinating in both your plays that there is a randomness of place and opportunity, of timing, what we do and don't have control over.

However, taken as a whole, the feedback I received after my performance made it clear that many people in the audience did not (or could not) experience my performance as 'theatre' or as significantly distinct in terms of form or function from the other talks. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the implications of this in relation to performance skills and technique and persona.<sup>50</sup> In the following section I explore the performance in terms of an encounter with the audience.

### **3.11 Encounter**

The *I-Thou* encounter, for Buber, is 'the cradle of Real Life, the eternal source of art, out of which the work arises' (1958 [1937]): 9-10).<sup>51</sup> This is an occurrence that can be neither experienced nor described, nor reduced to a sign. Buber states, 'If a test is made of its objectivity, the form is certainly not "there"' (1958 [1937]): 10). The occurrence of encounter can only be entered. In Israel, I experienced moments of letting go and of entering a dialogue with the audience; I sensed the presencing of an open space and of a shared becoming. In the wider context, my performance was one small part of something bigger, and more elusive. Something spiritual (relational) was happening to us all - something beyond words, a dimension of unity, harmony, love and connection, a dropping of boundaries, and the creation

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<sup>50</sup> Copies of the feedback I received by email can be found in Appendix Four.

<sup>51</sup> As part of the exploration into my question of spiritual and artistic integrity, I have begun a series of conversations with Rabbi Emeritus Jeffrey Newman. In one conversation he explained to me that in biblical Hebrew the word for faith is *Emunah* - made up of the root letters, אֵמֶן - aleph, mem, nun. These are also the root letters for the word art, *Omanoot*, אִמְנוּת, and for the word Amen, often translated as 'Verily, it is so' implying truth, trust and faith.

of community. There was an absence of ego, of I, of self or the individual, and instead there was an emergence of we and of us and of unity; it was as if, as Buber wrote, 'measure and comparison have disappeared' (1958 [1937]: 32).

It is, of course, entirely legitimate to ask - what is the audience's role in this dialogue? What happens to the spectator, what do they have to do, or not do, in the creation of encounter? Indeed, Buber himself reflectively poses the same question; he writes '[p]eople ask: what about the *I-Thou* relationship [...] is this always reciprocal?' He observes that it is familiar to look 'day after day into the eyes of your 'neighbour' who needs you after all but responds with the cold surprise of a stranger' (1970: 177) and reiterates that the encounter 'is a form of grace for which one must always be prepared but on which one can never count' (1970: 178). He reasserts that it is by 'inclusion' or 'embracing' the other in and as their wholeness, in furtherance of nothing at all, that something is awakened in the other (1970: 78). Wolford echoes this idea - that when the performer has as their sole intention to be in complete connection with themselves and their own inner process, they can *meet* the spectator. The performer can simultaneously connect to their inner-self and communicate the work they have been doing on themselves, to an-other. The spectator is simply in the audience, bearing witness, watching and listening. In this moment of potential meeting a subtle energy is transmitted, such that the attention of the spectator is aroused, and they are awakened to the encounter and to new experiences of their own (2001: 413).

In Chapters One and Two I discussed Grotowski's concept of Performer as a way of being. Grotowski also describes Performer as the 'bridge' between the witnesses and the energy of the performance and, referring to the audience, 'so to say, they feel presence' (2001: 377). I will discuss presence in further detail in the following chapter. However, for now it is worth noting that Goodall suggests that presence is 'a phenomenon that exists

through the eyes of the beholder, but [...] it is also experienced as very real by those who embody it' (2008: 2). In reference to the performative structure called *Actions*, Richards adds that it is 'not about the structures, not about meetings with spectators or witnesses. It's another meeting' (2008: 178). By 'another meeting', I understand Richards to be suggesting that the real work is work on self, and that the other meeting is meeting self and the consequent transformation of energy. I am proposing that in the process of making solo auto/biographical work, wherein the intention is specifically self transformation, the encounter with the audience is of this nature. That is to say, it is primarily for the performer, whose inner work is witnessed, recognised, acknowledged and appreciated by the audience. The feedback from the audience at my performance suggests that they appreciated me, in the sense of being grateful for my contribution, my honesty and sharing of my journey, but were less appreciative, in the sense of recognising the form and/or structure of what I intended as a performance. Taking into account that the meaning of a performance arises in particular from the context in which it is performed, that my performance at the reunion was in the immediate context of these afternoon reunion talks, and that I had abandoned the more easily recognisable theatre conventions of *State of the Union*, in favour of this seemingly more unstructured *Untitled* work I do not find this surprising. I return to this issue in more detail in the next chapter.

Perhaps the *I-Thou* encounter is not a mystical, mysterious event bound by consecrated places; perhaps, rather, it is found in the creation of spaces, in the everyday moments of people simply being together in openness. Buber writes that Judaism is not an abstraction, that God is not a metaphysical idea, and that theophany (the appearance of God) is something that actually happens, not as a transcendental outside myself 'over there' phenomenon, but by, from and between humans. According to Buber when an encounter



occurs, it is a space that people do not always recognise. He states that ideas and images do emanate from such a space; however, this space is neither image nor idea. What is revealed in the space of encounter is God (1973: 4). So, while we, the participants at the reunion, may not have articulated to each other 'that was a spiritual encounter', it could be argued that my offering of solo auto/biographical theatre contributed to the creation of live, immanent encounter.

After reuniting for three full days, we had re-formed as a community, re-established strong bonds, revived a long history, rejuvenated a shared memory, reignited a shared past that we could carry collectively into the future; a future which emphasised a fundamental set of shared values. For the time we were together we were drawing a new boundary around us. Malpas explains that according to Heidegger a 'boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing' (Malpas, 2012: 89-90). By establishing a boundary, a clearing is created within which a space, or an opening, has been made for something to arise, to reveal itself.

### **3.12 Conclusions**

This chapter has explored returns, and how returns, place and identity are inter-related. In its Greek origins the word theatre (θέατρον - theatron) means 'the seeing place'. Morash and Richards argue that 'theatre is not simply shaped by existing spatial formations, but itself produces space' (2013: 4). In this creative space the solo auto/biographical performer can be seen and witnessed. In these dynamic spaces the solo performer can constitute their identity anew. In the devising period that has been discussed, I consciously set out to fulfil on a specific aspect of such a personal self-transformation - that is, to forge a

new relationship with place, in this case with Israel. Through writing and reflection, I continued to release my self from my habitual inner conversations. I loosened the domination of the longstanding grip the family narratives and expectations about Israel have had on my thinking. I began to sever the hold that old stories, and stagnant emotions have on my ability to feel settled in another place that is not Israel, and prevent me from experiencing an equal sense of home and belonging anywhere else; bell hooks expresses this precisely and poetically when she writes, 'I have yearned to find my place in this world, to have a sense of homecoming, a sense of being wedded to a place' (2009: 2).

Devising *Untitled Work* enabled me to understand that the practice of 'digging deep', as Benjamin suggests, is a crucial aspect of the transformative process. The intensity, immersion and commitment I brought to this performance exceeded anything I had done before, with the exception of *Moses, Morris, Harry & me*. Through this immersion I began to realise that as I severed my attachments to place 'from all earlier associations' (Benjamin, 1999: 576), I could start to release myself from the 'grip' Israel, Haifa and Machanayim all have on me. This grip reveals itself to me in 'inner-dialogue' and insists 'I must be loyal and return to Israel' and is preventative of free choice and agency over my future.

Misri Dey proposes solo devising as a distinguishable area of practice (2015: 15) and in the introduction to the thesis I ask whether there are elements of devising a solo auto/biographical performance that can be distinguished as central to the self-transformative process and/or catalysing the self-transformational moment. Pearson includes excursions and field trips as 'mnemonics for reflection' (2006: xiii). On this trip to Israel, as part of my own research and devising process, specifically in preparation for the performance, I made a field trip back to Machanayim where I discovered, quite unexpectedly, that the dairy farming complex of the kibbutz - the milking parlour, cowsheds and corrals - where I had worked as a

young man, had all been razed to the ground. No visible trace remained. This was a shock that challenged my identity. Peter Brook writes about Grotowski's work that

It gave each actor a series of shocks.

*The shock of confronting himself in the face of simple irrefutable challenges.*

The shock of catching sight of his own evasions, tricks and clichés.

The shock of sensing something of his own vast and untapped resources. (2002 [1968]: 11, my emphasis)

Indeed, this return to Machanayim, to the one place I have 'held' as home, and as a constant, for almost half a century was an entirely, stark awakening to a new reality, and to a new acceptance that the home in Israel I was yearning for no longer existed, except in my memories. Just as I wrote earlier in the thesis, in the literature review, regarding the play *The Drawer Boy*, there was a breaching of worlds; between the imaginary world - that existed only in the story I told myself - and the 'real' world, as it is. Out of this breach arose an unanticipated release, what I refer to as a breakthrough in being. This sublime moment gave me a much greater understanding of the loss and longing that I had been experiencing. In an instant I was able to see, feel and know, that my emotional attachment and bond had been to a world-space-place that no longer exists. This breakthrough released me back into life as it is; Grotowski calls this the 'vitality of life' (in Christof 2019: 120). Paraphrasing Sennett, the practice of 'exploring the locale' (Sennett 2008: 279) at this point in the research process had led to one of the most liberating and transformational experiences of the project. This shock, that the past I had been holding onto was genuinely in the past, allowed me to begin to envisage a new and different future that was no longer constrained by the narrative of place, home and diaspora. Reflecting later on this event, I realised that excursions, expeditions and field trips are a crucial practice in the transformative process that solo auto/biographical theatre offers. In my mind, I have come to refer to them collectively as 'performance peregrinations'.

Amongst the many performance practices that Grotowski encouraged was a condition or way of being he called 'the movement that is repose' (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 263), which 'signifies that the divine condition is that of *the one who learns to be alive*' (Attisani, 2008: 101, my emphasis). Psychologist Steve Taylor writes that an awakening such as the shock, and the subsequent moment of repose, I had experienced is 'a temporary expansion and intensification of awareness that brings significant perceptual, affective and conceptual changes' (2018: unpaginated). He suggests that loss is one of a number of possible triggers to an awakening experience (2018: unpaginated). He explains that by psychologically detaching from an old emotional bond, and more importantly by accepting such a detachment one enters into a 'positive, transformational state' (2011: 214).

Additionally, Morash and Richards suggest that performance is an intense, concentrated and accelerated experience (2013: 8). Potentially, it can rapidly consummate a self-transformation. I took this awakening/releasing experience into the performance which consolidated the breakthrough by fully embodying it. Repositioning and re-conceptualizing my history both cognitively and emotionally allowed the text to continue to work on me. By this I mean, by mindfully reflecting on the ideas in the written text and by actively integrating these specific new realisations and perspectives about myself and my life into the performance reinforced the insight that 'who I am is not my story of place'; my identity is not determined by places in my past. Bringing this insight into my performance allowed me to perform authentically, by which I mean truthfully, without reservation, inhibition or disguise. I could openly ask the question in dialogue with the audience, "what kind of life would I have to lead, and what narratives would I have to drop, in order to live a life of spiritual and artistic integrity?" This performance created a new space of possibility to imagine, visualise and

create a future that is far less constricted, more uninhibited and freer, and that I was free to tell, share and perform for others. Buber writes that

insofar as a human being makes do with the things he experiences and uses, he lives in the past and his moment has no presence. He has nothing but objects; but objects consist in having been [...] What is essential is lived in the present, objects in the past. (1970: 63-64)

By detaching from the story I carried about Israel, Haifa and Machanayim, I felt that I was transported into a new and different present, one which expanded the potential and advanced possibility for an encounter to arise with the audience.

This experience demonstrates Heddon's proposition that 'place is a habit' (2008: 93). Unwanted habits can be changed or broken. New choices can be made, rooted and embedded. *Untitled Work* began to demonstrate how solo auto/biographical theatre can affirmatively initiate the interrupting and altering of long held habits and act as a framework for discovering, making and embodying new choices. Using Heddon's metaphor it can be a process of remapping that allows one to view their life from a different stance and 'to 'write' the unknown or unrecognised route' (2008: 91) towards a new and possible future. Heddon reminds us that the original Greek *nostos* is to return home, and she suggests considering that nostalgia has the potential of restoring one's personal sense of wholeness and belonging (2008: 95). Nostalgia / home she argues is not just a return to place but to oneself (2008: 95). When the performer arrives in a place of wholeness and belonging they create the possibility and potential for encounter with the audience.

While the performance itself may not have been entirely 'successful' in creating an encounter, the overall process of devising allowed me nevertheless to retrace a journey back to myself, in particular to a recognition of myself as the source of the stories I inhabit. Devising and performing in Israel allowed me to re-author these stories and to rediscover a sense of

belonging that is not rooted in or limited to a geographical location but rather occurs in an autotopography, in 'the creative act of seeing, interpretation and invention' (Heddon, 2008: 91). It is worth noting too, the similarity to Attisani's description that Grotowski was 'more interested in techniques with an 'existential specificity' (techniques for seeing), than in 'expressive' techniques (techniques for showing) (Attisani, 2008: 79). I will focus on technique in the following chapter, how technique relates to skills and how together they form a potential to achieve a way of being I come to call 'beyond technique'.

## CHAPTER FOUR - (BEYOND) THE TECHNIQUE OF TELLING STORIES

### 4.1 Introduction

I went to Israel in 2018 having rehearsed a story of becoming and prepared to perform. For the purpose of this thesis, I consider the concept of becoming as a creative potential or energy, and I am following Deleuze, who states that '[b]ecoming isn't part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new' (1995: 171). My intention was to create and tell a new story about myself. I intended to perform the story of becoming a performer, one with a script and a form and structure. However, by the time of the reunion I had jettisoned almost everything I had prepared beforehand. This conscious decision was in part precipitated by the time constraints I became aware of, but more so by a growing awareness that to be and become *Performer* - according to Grotowski's definition, as a warrior, a rebel, not playing another, fighting to reduce the unknown to the known (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 376) - I had to take a risk, what Grotowski calls *submitting to my destiny* and *trusting the process* (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 377).

The mixed audience feedback, discussed in the previous chapter, raises the question, especially given this particular audience of friends and close acquaintances: What would have ensured that the work was experienced as performance rather than a talk? Writing theoretically about restored behaviour in a variety of contexts, Schechner suggests that the performer 'no longer has a "me" but has a "not not me"' (1985: 112) and he suggests that '[e]lements that are "not me" become "me" without losing their "not me-ness"' (1985: 111). However, it is possible that this distinction, between *not me* and *not not me*, can be blurred when audiences do not fully apprehend or recognise the dynamics of specific types of

performance. This was discussed earlier in reference to ‘*Troubling Identities: Claire Dowie’s Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt*’ (see Chapter One). The character of *not me* which is on stage (which is not the actual *me* as I live my life) has permission from the audience to manipulate the ordinary; the *not not me* offers the audience glimpses into my life. Performing a persona successfully is directly correlated with the performer’s level of skill and self awareness, and their ability to ‘let go’ of their past and evacuate themselves (*me*) thereby presenting the persona on stage (*not me* but *not not me*). In hindsight I believe that in large measure I was responsible for the audience’s confusion about whether I made a performance or gave a talk at the reunion. This was due to the fact that from the commencement I stepped in and out of the different roles. I began from offstage and on entry as *not me / not not me*, that is, the character Mo appeared. I then immediately switched back to *me*, the referent, Mo who stands outside the performance, in order to acknowledge Nemtin, the previous performer, and then I switched back to performing as my character *not me / not not me*. Taviani argues that [b]eing a witness instead of a *spectator* underlines above all the need to have an awareness of the kind of phenomenon one is attending’ (2009: 138, italics in the original). This erratic beginning failed to provide a firm definition of what I was doing or what my audience was attending. Moreover, this lack of clarity was compounded by my own conflating at the time - and indeed, in my naivety, perhaps from the very beginnings of this Practice as Research project - of performance and theatre. My audience expected an event that would be recognisable to them as ‘theatre’. In this case, something that would have been more consistent with the original ‘black-box form of *State of the Union - My Year with Donald Trump*, that I previously performed and had arrived with in Israel. Instead, I offered something different, which - because mostly they did not have a background in either theatre or performance - the audience were unable to ‘read’ as performance. In terms of my research



and performance this 'failure' provided a deeper understanding that clarity, consistency and coherence are decisive to solo auto/biographical performances which contain any possibility of an encounter; any confusion is a barrier to real meeting.

Performer Anna Deavere Smith asserts that in her biographical work 'to acknowledge the other, you have to acknowledge yourself' (1993: 51). This is equally true in auto/biographical performance. By 'acknowledging yourself', I understand Deavere Smith to mean being aware of one's own history and story, and to be willing to own one's perceptions and beliefs. Schechner proposes that Deavere Smith's skill is not to pretend to be another but to incorporate, and that '[t]o incorporate means to be possessed by, to open oneself up thoroughly and deeply to an-other being' (1993: 63). To become *not not me* in an auto/biographical performance implies that the performer has the skill to subtly distinguish between themselves and the character of themselves they are performing. Despite this deficiency in my ability, in and through the performances discussed in the two previous chapters I had moved gradually but consistently from being and feeling unskilled, dispersed and unintentional, to becoming progressively more skilled on stage. In particular, in Chapter Two I described how imprecise and scattered my performances were and how rehearsing with a director was fundamental to first establishing, and then developing, my skillset. Skills are abilities that are acquired through learning, training or practice. Physical skills include for example: balance and flexibility, coordination; vocal skills include: projection, inflection and articulation. Technique, on the other hand, is the manner in which skills are addressed. In performance. At this point in the research, I understand technique as more akin to the way (of being) a performer approaches their work. For example, are they present, authentic, intentional, invested or committed? Acting coach Gary Spatz suggests that '[t]echnique is a collection of good habits that each artist develops for themselves, and that is their way of

approaching and executing talent' (2010: unpaginated). I have found it key, throughout this project, to differentiate between the skills and techniques of performing, while paying attention to and developing both in order to presence the *not not me* who can begin to articulate new and alternative perspectives on old stories of place, space, home and diaspora that I (*me*) can reincorporate back into my life off stage. In this chapter I focus more on technique as I have found in my Practice as Research that this is where most of my attention has been placed.

It is only by watching the recording, and reflecting on the performance in Israel, that I have been able to recall that inwardly, as I moved into the performance, I felt like I was not depending or relying on techniques; it was *as if* they were no longer informing or guiding the performance. I felt that the skills of performing that I had rehearsed, in conjunction with my developing technique, had begun to transform into something else, another ineffable way of being. Hyde and Kopp refer to this other way of being as residing in the realm of 'over beyond what naturally is' (2019: 208), a metaphysical realm of being which is overlooked by today's western epistemology and is outside everyday awareness. Actor David Warrilow states

I am responsible for certain aspects of a performance, but there's a whole other level which is coming from outside of me. What I'm supposed to do is channel that, whatever it is. My image of it is that energy - light - is coming to the top of my head, which is where the 'soul' is supposed to enter the body; and that I am to channel it. It is channelled this way... goes through the vocal, physical, breathing mechanism which is called David Warrilow and then it is given to whom ever is waiting to receive it. (2002: 318)<sup>52</sup>

Warrilow is calling attention to the way of being that began to emerge in the performance in Israel which I refer to as 'beyond technique'. This was the sensation of performing while something else, outside myself, other than me, was (albeit briefly rather than consistently)

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<sup>52</sup> Warrilow's use of the concept *whole other level* resonates with Grotowski's conception of verticality and higher consciousness, discussed later in this chapter.

guiding what was happening. The emergence of energy or light or guidance that 'is given to whom ever is waiting to receive it' is almost certainly one doorway to encounter. However, herein lies a paradox, it cannot be controlled or harnessed, perhaps not even followed. For the energy to remain or continue, the performer can only let themselves 'go with that, "the where I am" with that, and let [it] go almost by itself' (Richards, 1997: 41).

I propose that in order to access, enter and accomplish a state of 'beyond technique', first the performer must acquire a sufficient level of competency in the other levels of theatre technique. For Grotowski, this is a process of *unlearning* - for example, learning '*not* to think of adding technical elements', learning 'to be free from resistance' (2002 [1968]: 36, my emphasis); he describes this process as a road (2002 [1968]: 17) or a journey (2002 [1968]: 38) and states that the training in his theatre in Poland, Theatre Laboratory, was always 'toward the possibility of making such a process visible' (2002 [1968]: 17). By *making the process visible*, Grotowski is suggesting that what the spectator eventually sees (both in and from the actor) is a state of coherence, congruence, integrity and unity. Grotowski suggests that this state of being is achieved by the 'laying bare of one's own intimacy' (2002 [1968]: 17). This means the actor is uninhibited, unafraid of their most vulnerable or painful emotions; they become transparent and undisguised, revealing to the audience states of being that more usually remain private and unseen. They accomplish a quality Grotowski calls 'transluminated' (2002 [1968]: 16).

Although my practice has neither been in Poland, nor directly with Grotowski, I have drawn deeply on these ideas - that allowing oneself to be fully seen, being unafraid of one's feelings or unhindered by one's previous failures, and by practicing being specific, consistent, intentional and detailed in action, posture, movement, gesture, voice, tone etc. - the performance, and the character being performed, become more precise and integrated into

a whole, and the theatrical quality I am calling 'beyond technique' becomes more readable to the spectator. As Heidegger aptly comments, in reference to Being (Dasein), 'that undefinable something not only does not slip away but displays its gathering force ever more luminously in the course of the dialogue' (1971: 13). That is to say, as the performer finesses their technique, and the more embodied it becomes, the less noticeable it is and yet paradoxically the more readable it is. Grotowski maintains that it is this state of being that 'abolishes' the distance between actor and audience and increases the possibility of the encounter (2002 [1968]: 41). I suggest that when the performer is disarmed and unattached, the gift of their performance is more legible and so more easily received by their audience. When there is no distance between the performer and their audience, the meeting between them is transformed - from a mystical event to an everyday encounter. For Buber, who 'early in his life went through a mystical phase [...] and if anything, became an antimystic' [...] it is precisely in this earthly existence that the Thou is to be met (Glatzer, in Buber, 1966: 13).

In this chapter, I distinguish technique from 'beyond technique', especially as understood by Grotowski, and analyse how this level or state of being manifested in the performance I made on my return from Israel, simply called *A Work-in-Progress*. In particular, I explore *Work-in-Progress* from the perspectives of story, time and place (all of which were introduced in previous chapters), expanded to include persona, presence and authenticity. Throughout the chapter I explore how the capacity of the solo auto/biographical performer to inhabit their persona on stage may be directly correlated to their facility to be both authentic and present, and the degree to which the performer's persona can shape their storytelling.

## 4.2 An Overview of Grotowski's Approach to Skills and Techniques

Throughout his career, Grotowski consistently sought out and researched exercises, procedures and activities that he believed would allow the actor to master their skills and to overcome their inhibitions, to release what he describes as 'that which is most personal and always do it authentically' (Grotowski, 2002: 238). Grotowski also uses technique interchangeably with both skill and method as in this next example: 'I was searching for a positive *technique* or, in other words, a certain *method* of training capable of objectively giving the actor a creative *skill* that was rooted in his imagination and his personal associations' (2002 [1968]: 133, my emphasis). Theatre of Production skills training (1959-1968) involved gymnastics, acrobatics, breathing exercises, rhythmic dance, plastic motion, yoga, mask composition, pantomime (Fowler, 1985: 174). Regarding technique during this period, Grotowski states clearly that '[o]urs then is a *via negativa* - not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks' (2002 [1968]: 17). He states that 'it is not a matter of learning new things, but rather of ridding oneself of old habits' (2002 [1968]: 128). Here I understand Grotowski to be using *habits* to indicate entrenched and embodied patterns of thinking or behaviour.

Contemporary research evidences that physical exercises including yoga change the energy happening inside the body in different ways, including inhibiting anxiety (Streeter et al., 2010: unpaginated). The approach of *via negativa* is described by Paul Allain as

finding that freedom of action, of not hesitating, of turning impulse into action and stopping that self-judgmental voice in the head that's always saying, 'Am I good enough?' Instead, you really commit to something, like the idea of the gift, you give yourself totally: the 'holy actor'; it's an act of submission. However, if it's too vain, if it's too egotistical, then it becomes an imposition. (in Cleaves, 2017: unpaginated)

This description of *via negativa* aligns with the discussion in Chapter One that positions self-transformation as disentangling oneself from old ideas, including stories, and disengaging with unwanted and fixed ways of thinking and being. In Grotowski's next stage of research, Paratheatre, he ostensibly abandoned theatre skills development, and focused his research far more specifically on work on the self, in order to 'dissolve the masks of imposture most people wear as their ordinary social selves' (in Schechner, 2001d: 211). The practices and procedures involved

a cycle of meetings between people who did not know one another at first, but gradually upon getting accustomed to one another, rid themselves of mutual fears and distrust. (Kolankiewicz, 1978: 8)

Kolankiewicz describes Paratheatre as an experiment designed to cause the participants 'to release in themselves the simplest, most elementary inter-human expression' (Kolankiewicz, 1978: 8). No one could be a passive spectator; everyone was actively engaged in a creative process that 'had the character of an act of life' (Kolankiewicz, 1978: 12).

The activities of these group meetings might more easily be recognised today as combinations of techniques or interventions of psychotherapy, marathon or encounter groups, vision quests, silent retreats, or wilderness survival training, all of which were virtually unknown in Poland in the early 1970s. As Allain describes

They would spend [...] days in nature and people would immerse themselves in water and in grain, in non-urban spaces. Very experiential, we'd possibly call it therapy today, but it was never couched in that way. It seems very much of its time, in terms of the hippy culture, but in fact in Poland this only became more established later (in Cleaves, 2017: unpaginated).

Jenna Kumiega reports that the specific techniques included: being in silence, working with movement and sound, running and walking in forests in the dark, sleeping outdoors and various domestic activities (2001: 243-245), all of which have become far more prevalent in contemporary self-development programmes. While the concept of eco-dramaturgy has only

emerged in the last few decades (May, 2021: 4), Grotowski seems to be aware of the interconnectedness of human beings and nature even in the early 1970s. During this period, he describes the most essential aspect of the performer as the recognition that they are ‘man-bird, man-colt, man-wind, man-sun, man-brother [...] brother of the earth [...] brother of the sun [...] the brother of Milky Way, the brother of grass, the brother of river’ (2001: 221). The theatrical activities and techniques included in Paratheatre were an intense and incisive period of work on the self.

In the overlapping phase of Theatre of Sources (1976-1982), Grimes describes how long walks, listening to the sounds of animals, hugging trees, lying on the earth, crawling in the forest, watching fish, running through the forest during the night, and walking under waterfalls continued as activities designed to disarm the performer and foster authentic encounter (in Schechner and Welford 2001: 272), while Grotowski’s research explorations also expanded to include Sufi dancing, Zen practices and shamanic healing. His teaching staff now comprised practitioners from India and Haiti, whose knowledge was intended to reach below recognised theatre techniques to the ‘sources of the techniques of sources’ (Grimes, in Schechner and Welford, 2002: 272). Additionally, (as discussed previously in section 3.10 of the thesis) Grimes suggests that, for participants in the activities of Theatre of Sources, ‘what is discovered [...] is [...] ‘the movement which is repose’ (2001: 271). Antonio Attisani explains that for Grotowski the movement which is repose means ‘to be alert, active in watching, to be centred, the bearer of a direct and nonverbal consciousness’ (2008: 100).

During the next phase of research, Objective Theatre (1983-1986), actors were trained in other ‘specific non-Western performing practices’ (Welford, 2001: 286) by specialist teachers who came from countries including Haiti, Colombia, Bali, Korea and Taiwan. Together with Grotowski, these teachers developed a method in which precise

physical techniques, based on a sequence of movements and patterns of vocal vibrations, were central. Grotowski deepened his search for a 'type of performance associated with very ancient ritual traditions' that found its origins in the times before art and rite became separated and before artistic creation was separated from its ritual purpose (Wolford 2001: 289). One of the methods of this phase that is particularly pertinent to my project, is the practice of creating

mystery plays around a song related to an individual childhood memory, most often associated with the person's family [...] In the first stages of work with these songs participants were simply asked to sing the song, trying to remember more completely both the song and the associations with which it was connected. Later they began to create individual actions on the basis of these songs sometimes connected to their memories of who first sang the song to them and the context of surrounding events. (Wolford, 2001: 287)

I have incorporated this method - of working with memory and associations, using singing and song as a prompt and catalyst - into devising my performances, most particularly in the thesis performance which I detail in Chapter Five.

In the final stage of his research and career, Art as Vehicle, Grotowski collaborated intensely with Thomas Richards and Haitian artist, Maud Robert. Grotowski supervised their directing of two small groups of actors each 'developing performative structures that related actions to ancient traditional songs; using art as a practical means for exploring processes of a spiritual nature' (Christof, 2019: 19). These actions were detailed and crafted works of performance that were not intended for regular public viewing; rather, Grotowski's research focused at the time on decoding 'the performative elements of ancient ritual' (Christof, 2019: 139). Dominika Laster explains that 'Grotowski designates these performative practices as instruments of verticality' (2016: 94). Verticality is an energetic force which elevates the performer towards a higher level of consciousness and presence within which Performer is



free. Grotowski writes 'Performer with a capital letter [...] is outside aesthetic genres' (2001: 376). Within this higher level of consciousness, a phenomenon may occur which Grotowski calls the *I-I* relation and describes as not 'to be cut in two, but to be double [...] to be passive in action and active in seeing [...] Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present' (Grotowski, 2001: 378).

These phases of Grotowski's career, taken together, form one continuous, coherent pathway, always in search of the *I-Thou*. Schechner declares '[t]he Grotowski work is spiritual' and reaffirms that

[h]is is not an obscurantist mysticism, but one connected to the ancient tradition of gnosis and the Hasidic figure of the exiled, wandering Shekhinah: a search for "scattered truth," sparks hidden in far-away places, barely discernible, in need of gathering, re-assembling, re-connecting. Grotowski's goal was, and is, to approach - yet not grasp, hold, possess, or in any way squeeze to death - a definite and particular kind of spiritual knowledge. This knowledge, though concrete and expressible in terms of sound and movement, is ineffable, not translatable into words. That is why it so often takes the shape of song, "action" or "motions (in Schechner and Welford 2001: 464-465)

At this point in the research and in my practice, Schechner's description accurately reflects what Grotowski has referred to previously as my life, my process, my destiny (see section 1.4).

#### **4.3 Authenticity, Presence and Persona**

For the purposes of this transformative project, I find it is useful to follow Australian performer Garry Lester who distinguishes between technical performance which is 'based in form and structure and virtuosic display' and *being* which 'delves deeply into inhabitation, immersion, letting go and dancing on the edge of technique, arriving at a place of transformation and revelation' (2020: unpaginated, my emphasis). This aligns with Pavis's

concept of authenticity, which he explains is less about *knowing* oneself than it is in *being* oneself, maintaining the right to be different and being able to lead one's own life as one wishes (2016: 18, my emphasis). Guignon points out that 'the ideal of authenticity is a project of becoming the person you are' - that is, finding the parts of yourself that are lost, displaced or forgotten (Guignon, 2004: 2). As Jenny Kidd notes, however, '[a]uthenticity is a contested and controversial concept' and suggests that authenticity is not an inherent quality of an object or experience, but something ascribed to it (2011: 22). Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues, in an article specifically about authenticity in the context of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition, that while the contemporary understanding that 'being true to myself means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover' (1994: 31), there is also a need for mutual recognition and acknowledgement of identity, that is each 'person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being' (1994: 25). As philosopher Anthony Appiah states '[m]y being, say, an African-American among other things, shapes the authentic self that I seek to express' (1994: 153).

Kidd notes that, conventionally, definitions of authenticity involve 'such terms as accurate, genuine, real, true, or actual' (2011: 25). Phillip Auslander writes 'we often praise acting by calling it "honest" or "self revelatory", "truthful"; when we feel we have glimpsed some aspect of the actor's psyche through her performance, we applaud the actor for "taking risks", "exposing herself"' (2002b: 53). Michiko Kakutani gives the examples of Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Laurence Olivier in *The Entertainer*, where 'the actor exposed himself in such a way that it was a kind of revelation of soul' (1984: unpaginated). Stephan Brecht describes Cieślak's performance in Grotowski's *Constant Prince* in similar terms: 'There were no gestures *of* a body, only gestures *by* a body: corporeal monologue of spirit itself. An

incarnation' (Brecht, 2001: 127 italics in the original). For Auslander, 'it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths' (2002a: 54). However, Heddon points out that the assumption in auto/biographical performance that something is true solely because it is autobiographical can be problematic (a reflection I pursue in more detail below, in the section about the performer Ken Campbell). The idea that 'because I saw and felt, then it must necessarily be so' (Heddon, 2008: 26) does not automatically make it so even when there is considerable agreement about the experience by those involved or even other commentators.

However, Heidegger approaches the question of authenticity from the opposite direction. He asserts that human beings are *thrown* to be *inauthentic*. Here for Heidegger, inauthentic is not a pejorative or derogatory term. It is for Heidegger an observation, a description of an existential fact (Sherman, 2009: 2), that the everyday ways of being of one human being become indistinguishable from the everyday ways of being of every other human being. Heidegger's powerful assertion is that

This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded. (Heidegger, 1962: 164)<sup>53</sup>

Sherman refers to this as a 'levelling down of the truest and best possibilities of Dasein to a common currency of existence' (2009: 2). By 'levelling down', Sherman means heading towards the average and the ordinary, rather than in any hierarchal sense. He describes this aspect of human behaviour as engaging in a 'world of experience made up of fads, styles,

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<sup>53</sup> Heidegger's understanding of Dasein was discussed earlier in Chapter One.

behaviors, and vernacular, in which we automatically participate and take for granted' (2009: 2); I am inauthentic because I become The They.

To be authentic, then, is a personal act of reclaiming, and taking ownership of my possibilities and my own ways of being. Indeed, Grotowski describes the rehearsal period for an actor as 'a terrain of discoveries about himself, his possibilities and his chances to transcend his limits' (1995: 118). Heidegger initially calls this type of reclamation an act of resoluteness: 'In resoluteness we have now arrived at the truth of Dasein which is most primordial because it is authentic' (Heidegger, 1962: 343). He later softens his language and refers to authenticity as

To let be - that is, to let beings be as the beings that they are - means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself. (Heidegger, 1993b [1967]: 125).

In other words, when the performer can let things be - exactly as they are - they are being authentic, and they are free. I believe this is similar to Grotowski's description of Performer, one who is in touch with something 'essential' about themselves, 'what they did not receive from others, what did not come from the outside, what is not learned' (2001: 377). The 'total act' transcends all the skills and techniques that have been learned, rehearsed and practiced; it is an act of openness. Performer therefore is authentic in what they stand for, and indifferent to the everyday opinions and judgement that surround them. There is no gap or divergence between their thoughts and impulses and their actions. They are not catering to the expectations of the audience. They are not imprisoned behind the masks they wear, and they are faithful to their own destiny (Grotowski, 2001: 377). In this sense, being authentic generates the conditions for feeling, or experiencing oneself as free. These acts of

resoluteness, being authentic and letting be, in devising, rehearsing, and performing are vital components of 'beyond technique', letting myself be myself.

Heidegger writes that Dasein, the being of human being, 'is in each case essentially its own possibility [...] But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be authentic' (1962: 68). However, he also proposes that 'Being means presence [Anwesenheit]' (1977: 285); thus, to be, authentically, is to be present. The performance theorist Bert O. States is also concerned with being. He differentiates between an actor's presence and an artist's presence, and he writes that '[t]he distinction is roughly that between doing and being' (2002: 26); in the same article he also refers to presence as a force and as an energy (2002: 27). Mime artist Paul Macneill suggests that

Stanislavsky offers a way of understanding 'presence' through the various meanings of experiencing including: 'unbroken concentration' throughout a play, and 'states of mind and being' that could foster inspiration and creativity. The word also refers to 'I am': a transcendent feeling of being fully aware and present in the moment. (2014: 139)

Pavis writes that "'to have presence" in theatre jargon, means knowing how to captivate the audience, being endowed with an indefinable quality' which 'theoreticians fall back on when confronted with an inexplicable mystery' (1998: 285). For Grotowski, 'when the performer is fully present, he is therefore available to be part of an "unmediated relationship with the world"' (in Christof 2019: 25). Christof compares Grotowski's understanding of such an unmediated relationship with the world to Buber's *I-Thou* relationship, which she interprets as 'being completely available to a relationship with the divine' (2019: 25). She explains that to achieve this, the performer strips away 'anything that kept it separate from the self' (2019: 25). In this way, the 'performer becomes a transparent vehicle for exploring an experience of the present moment' (2019: 45).

This process of stripping away ultimately returns the performer to a space of being which, as I discussed earlier (section 3.9), Heidegger describes as a clearing from where a new possibility (way of being) can arise or be revealed. I have also described this process as evacuating oneself. In this case what can arise from the space is the on-stage persona. Luckhurst and Mayer write that '[t]he concept of persona is related to the idea of the theatrical mask as a strategic construction of an identity that is complexly metatheatrical and performed' (2019: 2). Persona, as Louise Peacock emphasises, rests on 'the blurring of the distinction between the everyday personality of the performer and the persona of the role performed' (2017: 123). While I am not suggesting that identity, self or life are fixed and stable, the solo practitioners I discussed in my practitioner review (see Chapter Two) - in particular, Spalding Gray, Lisa Kron, Deb Margolin and Ken Campbell - give the appearance onstage of being almost indistinguishable from their off-stage selves. However, Marshall, Moore and Barbour state that 'persona is not the individual. It has all the appearances of being an individual, but it is in fact the way an individual can organise themselves publicly' (2020: 2-3). Indeed, Auslander suggests that a stage persona is a device that is created specifically to serve the needs of the performance and finds its roots in the performer's personal experience. He suggests that a persona is closely aligned to the performer and deliberately sets out to create a sense of tension or ambiguity between performer and persona (2015: 66). He proposes that the persona is not a fictional character per se but is 'a construct designed to allow the performer to work within specific aesthetic, genre, social, and cultural frames and discourses' (2015: 76). Of particular relevance to my practice thus far is his observation that 'persona is not a universal concept whose manifestations are identical in all contexts' (2015: 77). Rather the construction of a persona is highly context-specific and depends on the contexts in which it occurs (2015: 77).

After leaving the Wooster Group, Spalding Gray began meticulously to develop the persona of 'Spalding Gray' which became a character in its own right. In my performance in Israel, I too attempted consciously to construct a persona. One that would pair with the context of the reunion; that would be recognisable to people who had known me as a teenager but did not know how I had matured into a man of seventy, who could authentically (truthfully) engage with questions of Jewish spirituality, which I (me/Mo off stage) still found uncomfortable, awkward and confusing, and whose presence on stage might 'meet' the audience in an encounter.

Often an on-stage persona such as Gray's is formed over an extended period of time in relation to a specific community and can be recognised and understood by that community. When a persona is opaque, and the performer is equivocal, it can make it hard for the audience to believe in the character. Dell Placette writes of Gray that '*he doesn't impersonate*' (1989: 37, my emphasis). By impersonate here I understand Dell Placette to mean there is no attempt to adopt or play the role of somebody else. Rather, Auslander describes Gray as 'using the stage as a means for recreating aspects of his life' (2005: 167) and he quotes Gray as saying that 'I became a kind of inverted method actor. I was using myself to play myself [...] a kind of creative narcissism' (2005: 167). In Israel it was my intention to use the stage to recreate fifty years of my life (in twenty minutes) for my audience.

Jeff Merrifield told me in interview that Ken Campbell was always himself on stage, "it was always Ken, both himself and his character, it was a mixture, they were woven close together, almost indistinguishably" (Merrifield, 2021). Similarly, Daisy Campbell told me that 'what you saw on stage was what we saw at home; he did not come home and deflate into something considerably less' (Campbell, 2021). Campbell is using the descriptor 'less' to suggest that her father was equally as audacious and irreverent at home as he was in

performance, and not implying in any way that he felt that playing a role or adopting a persona was in any way hierarchical or ranked. Crucially, for my own process of becoming performer and artist she adds that ‘what Ken actually accomplished was to provide his audience glimpses into an extraordinary and authentic life - the life he lived’ (Campbell, 2021). Importantly, Merrifield writes that although Campbell’s ‘performance had all the naturalness of conversation’ and he ‘managed to make much of what he said sound like his own life’, ‘those parts may have been the most carefully crafted and rehearsed’ (2011: 380). Colin Watkeys describes Campbell’s shows and artistry as

[making] it look as if Ken was coming out and talking off the top of his head. In actual fact they were the product of intense review and reworking, structured according to a well refined process. (in Merrifield, 2011: 352)

Watkeys stressed in interview how this aspect of his work with Campbell, of honing each show with attention and precision, was pivotal to the success of those auto/biographical solo performances (Watkeys 2018). To some degree the feedback I received after my performance at the reunion indicates that I successfully provided the audience with authentic glimpses into my life.

#### **4.4 Work-in-Progress**

In 2002, Ken Campbell made a performance, which was filmed, about Werner Erhard. In the performance he recounts his participation in, and personal experience of, the est training. The performance is in two parts: *Part 1 From est to Exile - The Dark Descent of Werner Erhard, my part in it*, and *Part 2 Booga is not a Cherokee Indian Word* (Campbell, 2020). They epitomise the impromptu, or off-hand, style that Ken Campbell had perfected. On the surface



Campbell's experience on the *est* training seems no different from my own.<sup>54</sup> However, in the performance, Campbell describes *est* from an all-together different perspective. He parodies the training and reframes it. Daisy Campbell explains that he 'took' *est*, not because it offered personal transformation, but because he wanted to immerse himself in this new kind of comedy (Campbell, 2021). He repositions Werner Erhard as a great comedian who has invented an entirely novel approach to comedic performance. Campbell refers to Erhard as 'one of the top weirdens' and states 'his name was Werner Erhard and I thought he was so good, I mean this was clearly a whole new form of humour' (Campbell, 2020: unpaginated). Just as Moreno describes Erhard and the *est* Training as not having been part of the human potential movement (see section 1.2), Campbell's ex wife Prunella Gee observes that neither did Campbell see himself as part of the 1960s counterculture.

While watching Campbell's performance, in this case as a member of the audience, rather than as the performer-creator, I experienced a complete rotation in my thinking. Campbell's depiction - of what were entirely familiar events and circumstances demonstrated how the familiar can be made exotic, and can be viewed differently, just by a slight adjustment of the lens of perception. The performance revealed to me how I could loosen the grip of my personal history, and thus the solidity of my identity, and learn to become someone who embodies the possibility of transformation for others, through laughter and humour. I became aware, in an all encompassing, immediate instant, that the family narrative I had inherited insists that it *is important to take things seriously*. I realised that both my grandfather (who I knew well), and my great-grandfather (who I know through family stories), both refugee journalists fighting for the voices of minorities, valued debate over humour,

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<sup>54</sup> I wrote about *est* and my own experience of the *est* training in Chapter One.

argument over amusement and contest over comedy. I suddenly understood why there is no easy banter at family gatherings, and why teasing is used as belittlement. However, I also suddenly and equally comprehended that I was not bound by this out-dated narrative. I understood, as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset states

[a]s a project, I am a possibility; as lodged in the circumstance (i.e., as present), I am a realization. Let it be clearly understood that, that possibility I am, is not the possibility of a mere thought; it is not just a possibility thought about, but a real one as well; it is a modality and component of living reality; it is an existing or living possibility (Ortega y Gasset, 2002: 134).

I realised I could take this 'living possibility' into my character on stage and hone this persona. I brought this new consciousness into the making of my performance at the 2018 *Drop the Story Festival*, simply entitled *Work-in-Progress*.

While the ultimate aspiration of my practice is self-transformation, in this performance it was not my primary research intention. This was an experiment to build on the Israel performance and continue working through some of the problems I had identified in the earlier performances of *1966* and *State of the Union*, about which I wrote in Chapter Two. In retrospect I believe these included: a lack of presence and precision; paucity of intention, cohesion and focus; and a lack of character definition. My on-stage character was too dispersed, scattered and diffused. This time I was committed to learning more about performing with exactitude and intentionality, with immediacy and spontaneity while delivering the performance as if it were nevertheless 'off the top of my head'.

During this period of research, I too was regularly 'road-testing' a show I called *David's Tavern* for the festival performance, to a small practice group of four people, including director Mark Drummond, all preparing to perform at *Drop the Story Festival* 2018. We would show each other our work, receive feedback, share ideas, review and refine it. Spalding Gray

writes something about his first monologue that helped me develop my practice and underscores again the importance Gray placed on the interaction with the audience:

I thought I was going to sit down and just really tell the story of my growing up and that nothing could possibly be funny about it. But people started laughing - the audience taught me what was funny about it. It was really a relationship; it wasn't just a monologue, it was a dialogue. (Gray, in Schechner, 2002: 163)

As the 2018 festival approached, however, *David's Tavern* was still incomplete and I decided to postpone it, even as a 'scratch' performance.<sup>55</sup> However, I felt that I could transfer my improvements in technique and skills to a different performance.<sup>56</sup> And so, as in previous festivals, the decision to devise new work, *Work-in-Progress*, was taken with only a short amount of time to prepare. Its form arose spontaneously in rehearsals with the group as I discovered that I could tell my [hi]story in a less earnest manner. I began an intensive period of experimentation and improvisations which satirised the construction of my own interpretations and identity.

I had often been told by others that whenever I try to be humorous, unlike Charlie Chaplin I just appear pathetic 'without the funny' (group feedback 2017-18). I had claimed this frank feedback as 'truth' and decided that without exception I should never perform anything comical or 'funny'. In this period of experimentation, however, I was encouraged by the new festival group to stretch again into the unfamiliar territory of the comedic, to transform this inhibiting narrative into discoveries about novel aspects of my self, and my story. The process combined a shift in being (that is, how I saw and perceived myself and therefore how I projected myself in performance) with some significant changes to my style

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<sup>55</sup> I have described scratch performances earlier in the thesis in Chapter Two.

<sup>56</sup> The group at this time consisted of psychotherapist and performer Mark Drummond, educator Amanda Bellamy, dance practitioner, clown and care worker Suzy Williamson, and community worker and Playback Theatre performer Katie Chaplin.

of writing. I made different choices about the stories I proposed telling - from earnest narratives about politics and transformation, to situations in my past that lent themselves more easily to becoming humorous anecdotes. I was supported and encouraged by my peers to drop an unhelpful part of my historical identity.

#### **4.5 Developing the Story/telling: the influence of Campbell and Gray**

Campbell called one of his more distinctive ways of being 'supposing'. He felt that if we allow ourselves to suppose something is true rather than asking whether something is actually true or not, life becomes more 'mind widening' (Campbell, 2018: 22). His daughter Daisy writes '[...] my Dad used to say to me [...] don't believe in anything [...] suppose everything' (Campbell, 2018: 22). Thus, I began to incorporate my own *supposings* into my thinking and writing; this became an important part of my devising process. Rather than searching for *the truth* about characters or events, I would *suppose* about the material I was planning to include in the performance - *suppose I reframed emotions, suppose I exaggerated him and made him a hero, suppose he failed rather than succeeded, suppose I described a miracle*. This allowed my creative process, thinking and writing to spiral into surprising, previously unimagined possibilities for the text and the performance.

~~Despite experimenting with a more comedic style of storytelling, while I was still focussed on self-transformation, not socio-political transformation, one objective of the performance was nonetheless to confront the audience's complacency in the face of the rise of authoritarianism in the world and to spur people into taking action. Indeed, this overlap between the personal and the political was being made quite overtly in the text.~~

Following Ken Campbell, I created a format that disorders time and chronology, which shifts between places and locations, mixes fact with fiction, juxtaposes actualities and fantasies, and exaggerates certain characters giving them a larger-than-life presence on stage. It also plays with ideas of causality. It merges my personal experiences with global events, such as the assassinations of United States Senator Robert Kennedy and the American civil rights leader Reverend Martin Luther King.

In this monologue I reframed anger, which is often considered a negative emotion resulting in abuse or violence, and considered how (as a teenager my perspective was that) angry people were championing the oppressed and advocating social transformation at a global level. I state

In the 1960s I was angry, we were all angry, very angry ... I guess I am still angry ... and I had heroes, Bob Dylan, he was angry, and Joan Baez, she protested and marched for civil rights. Joseph Heller was very angry, he was protesting the absurdity of war and Kurt Vonnegut who was incredibly angry after witnessing the immoral bombing of Dresden in the Second World War. And Ché of course who gave his life attempting to liberate the oppressed poor in Bolivia. We were all angry. We *knew* we were being lied to.<sup>57</sup>

Later in the monologue I switch from referring to well known personalities acting globally, to describing a personal friend, acting much more locally. Using Campbell's approach of exaggerating and fictionalising characters I transform him into a hero by saying

I'd like to say that the sixties changed lives. It changed all our lives. Fifty years ago, I was 19, and my best friend ... his name was Micha ... he wasn't just angry he was apoplectic [...] He was so enraged that he took a drill to his skull to release the fury [...] (Appendix Six: section xxiii.)

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<sup>57</sup> Bob Dylan (1941-) and Joan Baez (1941- ) were both prominent singer songwriters in the 1960s folk music revival. Baez was active in the American civil rights movement. Joseph Heller (1923-1999) is the author of *Catch 22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) is the author of *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). Ernesto (Ché) Guevara (1928-1967) was an Argentinian who became a Marxist political revolutionary, played a major role in the Cuban Revolution in 1961 and was executed by the CIA in Bolivia in 1967 where he was attempting to foment a continental Socialist uprising.

In dialogue with the audience I wonder out loud why in 2018 surrounded by a rise of authoritarianism globally, ‘people’- in this case my audience - do not seem angry, alarmed or aroused. The script of this performance entitled *Work-in-Progress* can be found as Appendix Six.

Daisy Campbell reports that ‘it is impossible to underestimate the influence of Robert McKee’ on her father. McKee’s storytelling and scriptwriting techniques allowed Ken Campbell to bring continuity, cohesion and direction to his monologues (Campbell, 2021). In the context of my own new work, the ‘spine’ or ‘through line’ of the performance *Work-in-Progress* (2018) was again my quest for spiritual and artistic integrity. I chose a number of what McKee calls *inciting incidents* (McKee, 1997: 181), events that put into motion ensuing complications or crises, which reach a climax and demand a final resolution. Inciting events also cause an imbalance in the life of the protagonist. As I have described previously inciting incidents in my own life have included the birth of my disabled sister (see section 2.6), being ‘held back’ and obliged to repeat a year at high-school and the ensuing experience of humiliation and shame, and rejecting Jewish education after feeling belittled by the Rabbi during my *bar mitzvah* ceremony at the age of thirteen.<sup>58</sup>

Daisy Campbell adds that her father also used a McKee technique known as ‘to the end of the line’ whereby the storyteller follows through the story to its termination at cosmic level or, as Daisy Campbell expresses it, ‘a showdown with cosmic forces, or a theophany’ (2021). An excellent example of just such a showdown is the climax of Ken Campbell’s monologue *Pigspurt* (1995: 105). In this scene Campbell meets God and rapidly discusses reality, comedians, heaven and hell, Christianity and the Solomon Islands in Melanesia.

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<sup>58</sup> The Hebrew terms *bar mitzvah* (masculine: בָּר מִצְוָה) for a boy and *bat mitzvah* (feminine: בַּת מִצְוָה) refer to the coming-of-age ritual in Judaism, and acceptance into the adult community.

In interview, Richard Schechner asks Spalding Gray about his creative process. Gray responds

I go through three stages. The first is trying to figure out what I'm thinking about and talking about by actually doing it. I have never prewritten a monologue; I depend on working off the audience, making it like a dialogue. The audience makes me feel smarter. An audience is more of a resonator than sitting in a room dealing with just a wall and yourself. But I do have an outline. (in Schechner, 2002: 165)

Gray's use of the description 'working off' indicates again that he is working together with the audience, feeling the energy of the room, entering into a dialogue or a conversation with them. He expands his explanation about his devising process and states

[i]t evolves in front of the audience from a basic outline. I know, going in, a lot of things I want to talk about, but I don't know exactly how I want to put them together. All the choices and editing happen right there. It's not work with props. It's not dance. It's sit and talk directly to the audience (in Dell Placette 1985: 67).

The inference here then, is that Gray is attempting to organise or arrange memories of important events in his past, in order to make sense and find meaning in them for himself. As he states in interview for the arts magazine BOMB with playwright and poet Karry Kammer,

[t]here was an outline of what I call special memories. An essential memory to me is erotic, something that gives you butterflies in the stomach. I see it as a red neon flashing light. The memories I remember are the ones I consider important. So I look down and I see certain key words like 'volley ball,' 'scallop.' And then I'll just speak impromptu from those keywords. The story begins like a film in my head. The memory is like a film and then I can re-remember it (in Kammer, 1986: unpaginated).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to this particular process of meaning-making as drawing on 'flashbulb memories' (2003: 16). She states that these are memories that 'have the vividness and detail of a flash photograph' and 'occur when the triggering event combines elements of surprise, emotional intensity, and consequentiality' (2003: 16). Gray also states that in the initial devising period, his method is to

- 1) be open to allow the story to come freely
- 2) begin the process of mental editing
- 3) speak the story first out loud to find its own voice
- 4) tape record the story and re-edit
- 5) take a transcript off the tape. (Dell Placette, 1985: 35-36)

For Gray this period of devising and testing in front of audiences was in fact 'the work'. Indeed, I have found in my own practice that this period of devising is often the most fertile in producing moments of transformation and new possibility. Campbell, it seems however, used the devising period solely to enhance and advance the performance and the storytelling, rather than for his own self development.

My own process, at this point, consisted of both similarities to and differences from Gray's method. First, in thinking, reflecting and writing I was open to the story emerging in its own way, without any censoring or editing. For example I made numerous lists, 'fifty reasons I do solo', or '60s events that rocked the world'. I noted interesting questions, 'How did I turn out this way', and 'what am I trying to do here'. I recorded snippets of overheard conversations, "I'm telling you, that device is eavesdropping everything we're saying in bed" (Gig Harbor, Washington: USA, 2018). I drew stage sketches, wrote poems and songs, collected and collaged images. The festival performers' group became my first audience, to whom I first spoke my ensuing ideas, stories and script out loud. I improvised, received feedback and began a process of editing to find the spine and create a format for the performance. Finally, the audience attending the festival, with whom I entered a dialogue became the co-creators of my performance.

Merrifield reports that it was a direct result of seeing Spalding Gray perform *Swimming to Cambodia* (1985), that Campbell started work on his own autobiographical



monologue *Recollections of a Furtive Nudist* in 1988 (Merrifield, 2011: 339). Watkeys adds that 'unlike Spalding Gray, Ken's energy didn't suit the whole sitting at a table thing' (Watkeys, 2018). Campbell and Watkeys 'worked feverously on a process of testing material in front of an audience, reviewing the material and then restructuring the material in the most effective way' (Merrifield, 2011: 342). Watkeys detailed in interview how they would test and retest story material to small audiences noting how and what they responded to, and in some cases, where the performance was in someone's living room 'when they fell asleep' (Watkeys, 2018). When working with Campbell on devising what he calls a show, Campbell would tell him the stories he had gathered 'on his capers' and talk about them, which would then develop into the spine of the narrative, after which they would 'do it, to discover which bits he wanted to include' (Watkeys, 2018). Thereafter,

the script developed after months of doing the show [...] things got written down ages after [...] *Jamais Vu* was the only one that got written down before he did it and it caused a real problem [...] it made it very difficult to perform, because Ken work orally [...] the stories changed [...] depending on the circumstances [...] that sort of life allows them to develop and find their real form. (Watkeys, 2018)

Daisy Campbell confirmed this when she told me that her father would tell stories and test parts of his script on unsuspecting listeners in what seemed to them everyday conversations, to elicit their responses (Campbell, 2021). Merrifield observes that this process of testing was 'destructuring the show for optimum performance potential', and herein lies a marked difference between Campbell and Gray. For Gray devising was about making therapeutic discoveries, for Campbell it was 'all about the performance' (Merrifield, 2011: 342).

Gray states that the process of discovering where the monologue is going and what it is about is a therapeutic practice in and of itself. He says

What I realized about the monologue is that in order to live my life in a free and open way, I have to have a monologue going. That's my way into the world. That's my transitional object. If I have a monologue going I can relax and not watch everything in life as material because I'm not searching for the next monologue [...] my transitional object is the personal monologue. And when I have one going I have a life. (Gray, in Schechner, 2002: 171)

Ken Campbell had less concern about personal transformation, but a life-long interest in science-fiction and in discovering the nature of reality. For Campbell storytelling, and comedy in particular, 'reveals another form of truth' (Merrifield, 2011: 20). His interest and intention were to 'engage audiences for a couple of hours' (2011: 22) bringing them together with the performer as 'seekers' (2011: 52) into 'an alternative state-of-everything view of life' (2011: 337). Daisy Campbell reports that Ken Campbell himself describes this intention as: making an artist's choice which is

To pose as exposing wrongs, but in fact deceive, but with a wilful mix of truth and lie, research and fantasy, so inscrutably compounded as to send the status quo hunting for needles that nobody's lost, in haystacks that don't exist, diverting attention from the ensuing release of hitherto imprisoned forces, which will bring about change, but of an unpredictable nature. (Campbell, 2021)

This short description encapsulates how I approached my performance *Work-in-Progress* at the 2018 *Drop the Story Festival*, most particularly in regard of bringing about change of an unpredictable nature. This also becomes an important perspective for me, in the future when writing the thesis performance, and attempting to make it nonlinear and to intermix the themes of the text. I write in more detail about this in Chapter Five.

In spite of its name, *Work-in-Progress*, (in which I was referring more to my life than my performance), my show was entire and complete in and of itself. It was not an improvisation, it was rehearsed and prepared, and yet it was extemporaneous - in both the sense of without notes *and* of or in the moment. For an hour on stage, in front of the audience,

moment by moment, I had no anticipation of the future and no holding on to the past; in each moment I experienced myself at one with the moment, as whole and complete - fulfilled. I wrote in my research journal shortly after the performance that

*Very shortly after I started performing, I suddenly felt I was channelling an energy that came directly from outside myself, from Source. It appeared as if out of nowhere and gathered momentum as I continued performing - the more I gave myself to it, the less ephemeral it felt and the more it fuelled me. I knew I could trust it and follow it.* (Research Journal, 2018)

Thomas Richards has written a similar response: 'I was like the rider on the horse, not telling the horse where and how to go, but just watching the horse fly, and in some way guiding it but guiding it without manipulating, just in some way directing it' (Richards, 1995: 14).

During the *Work-in-Progress* performance, each moment of presence, or 'letting go', seemed to lead inexorably to the next until, unexpectedly and quite suddenly, I sensed that the entire room, performer and audience, audience and performer, was enveloped in a prolonged, profound and shared silence. Actor Fiona Shaw relates that Peter Brook believes that 'all great religions in the world have one thing in common, they are in pursuit of silence. But it is not the silence of the leaden coffin, it is the silence of anticipation' (Shaw, in Kustow, 2001: 90). I believe this was the climax McKee describes, an unexpected moment of theophany; that this moment of shared silence in my *Work-in-Progress* performance was, in Buber's terms, a moment of real meeting between audience and performer, performer and audience. It was in my experience a moment of encounter.

In this performance, I attempted to experiment with everything I had learned thus far from Spalding Gray and Ken Campbell, from which new possibilities for my life and my personal potential could arise. William Large explains that possibility in this sense is a human way of existing, but first we, as human beings, have to take ownership of 'being possibility',

to make it our own. This owning is referred to as *mine-ness*; Heidegger writes 'Dasein is mine to be in one way or another' (1962: 68). The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset restates this clearly

[I]ife, which means primarily what is possible for us to be, is likewise, and for that very reason, a choice, from among these possibilities, of what we actually are going to be. (1957 [1930]: 47)

In hindsight, performing *Work-in-Progress* at the 2018 *Drop the Story Festival* was an unexpected experience of possibility which I could not then put into words at the time. No prior experience had ever equipped me to capture in language what had occurred. I experienced myself *beyond* any performing experience I had ever had of myself, where "beyond" is to be understood in the sense of *Aufhebung* ('to go beyond' but also 'to bring to fulfilment') (Attisani, 2008: 79). This experience of 'beyond technique' is a state of grace, or as Grotowski suggests a move from a low or coarse energetic frequency or to a subtle energy that is connected (Grotowski, in Richards, 1995: 125). Grotowski is not specific about this connection. He relates the coarser level to the level of everyday life. He calls the more subtle or higher connection as 'the passage, the direction' (in Richards 1995: 125). It could be the connection to the divine, to the other performers, to the audience or to all three. Heidegger's term for this ineffable quality was Dasein - *being-there*; he also referred to it as *the clearing* (1993b [1967]: 178). In biblical Hebrew the word for grace is *chen* (חֵן). The Judaic concept of grace, *chen*, connotes the unassumed and unconditional favour of one human toward another. In Judaism it is a divine gift or granting and always implies that God is involved 'behind-the-scenes'. For Buber, as I have stated previously (see section 3.11) encounter only ever happens by grace.

The particular state I am calling 'beyond technique' here is the outcome of the performer deliberately engaging in a journey of self discovery. This is a journey designed to

eliminate old attachments to limiting narratives. Eugenio Barba expresses this idea in the following way

In general, the performer's professional experience begins with the assimilation of technical knowledge, which is then personalized. Knowledge of the principles which govern the scenic bios make something else possible: learning to learn. This is of tremendous importance for those who choose or who are obliged to *go beyond the limits of specialized technique*. In fact, learning to learn is essential for everyone. *It is the condition that enables us to dominate technical knowledge and not to be dominated by it.* (1995: 9, my emphasis)

Barba's terms 'dominating technical knowledge' and 'not being dominated by technique' are almost certainly what Grotowski refers to as the culmination of *via negativa* for his actors. It is an essential theatrical experience in which something 'is happening in a most concrete way: in the senses, in the skin, in the tissues. *We are not taking possession of it, but it takes possession of us*' (Grotowski, 2001: 222, my emphasis). Grotowski writes that this is a

surpassing of limits, of a confrontation, of a process of self-knowledge and, in a certain sense, of a therapy. Such a method must remain open - Its very life depends on this condition - and is different for each individual. This is how it should be, for its intrinsic nature demands that it be individual. (2002 [1968]: 131)

It is an approach which Grotowski describes as going beyond the limits in order to experience 'the feeling of one's own freedom' (2002 [1968]: 129). This repositioning, or recontextualizing of experience - that 'we are not taking possession of it, but it takes possession of us' - as a tangible event, resonates closely with Erhard's concept of 'a context that uses you' (2010: 12).

Erhard writes

When a context uses you, there is nothing to remember and no rules to apply. Rather, [...] that context gives you [...] being and actions [...] as your natural self-expression. (Erhard et. al., 2010: 12)

Both men are hinting at and pointing people towards the idea that self is a fluid phenomenon; that it is not fixed or static, instead it is constantly *in-form-ation*, rather than ever being fully formed.<sup>59</sup>

I understand the surpassing of limits, of which Grotowski writes, as the ‘escaping’ or ‘outperforming’ of one’s thrownness to the world (see introduction to this thesis). This is, of course, inevitably different for each individual, and therefore cannot occur as the result of a method or formula, only via an individual’s commitment to their own freedom.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

In my practice, persona becomes the vehicle for the performer to inhabit, practice and voice narratives of possibility, thus strengthening and thickening the potential of these new perspectives to take root in the performer’s life off stage. As Heddon observes auto/biographical performance is ‘a way to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise’ and to ‘bring into being a self’ (2008: 3). States suggests that an actor is a kind of storyteller whose speciality is that they are the story they are telling (2002: 23). My inner-most experience of performing *Work-in-Progress* accords precisely with State’s description - in this performance I totally became the stories I was telling. As Grotowski states, ‘[The actor] must not illustrate Hamlet, he must *meet* Hamlet. The actor must create within the context of his own life and being’ (Grotowski, 2001: 53, my emphasis). I met my character Mo, and he met me.

This chapter highlights how authenticity and presence are interconnected and form integral components of ‘beyond technique’, both are required. This performance has enabled

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<sup>59</sup> Heidegger proposes that ‘hints’ [...] belong to an entirely different realm of reality’ (1971: 26), one which is suggestive of a way to approach being, but cannot be verbalised directly.

me to understand further that authenticity is thus an inner capacity to 'let go' of expectations and let things be. When the performer can 'let go', and 'let be', they become grounded in a place (an ontological space) of authenticity. What this space of being reveals is *presence*, and because of the interconnected nature of be-ing, simultaneously what presence reveals is authenticity. Figure 14 below represents authenticity and presence as separate and discrete phenomena, each giving rise to the other in turn. It shows the two phenomena as separate and discrete and suggesting that it is a 'chicken and egg' situation wherein it is impossible to tell which comes first.

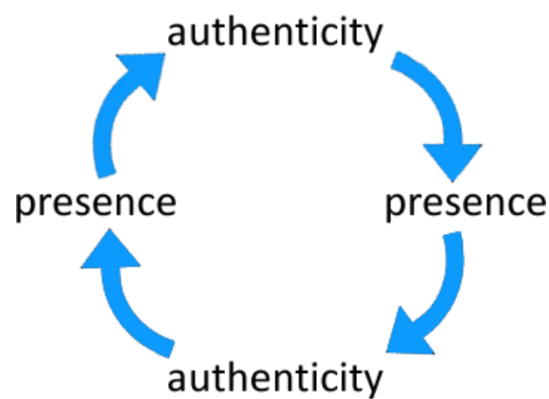


Figure 14. A diagram illustrating the phenomena of authenticity and presence as being separate and discrete

However, Figure 15 below shows the two phenomena as dynamic, integrated and constantly blending; each interdependent on the other.

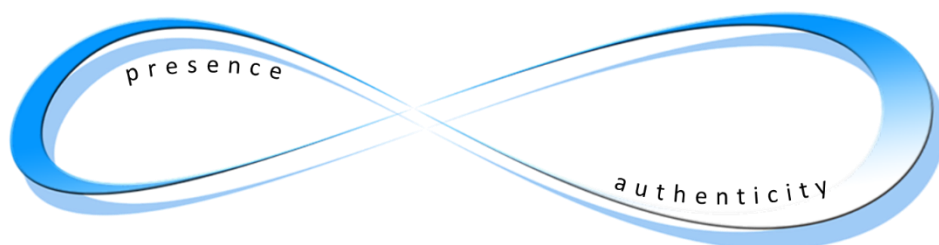


Figure 15. A diagram illustrating the phenomena of authenticity and presence as dynamic, re-iterative and blended

A more familiar example might be the Taoist understanding of 'yin and yang' where each energy contains the other, each arises with, and within, the other. In this case, as the performer is more present they are simultaneously more authentic, as they are more authentic they are simultaneously more present.

Moreover, my experience is that in those moments, when I - as-performer - am both authentic and present, something emanates, that affects the audience. My presence and authenticity catalyses authentic responses. The audience signals that they are present and that they recognise that which I am sharing. We each experience in our own way that which is passing between us. For me as the performer it is that I (the character or persona) am telling stories that are intended to indicate that I (the referent) am conscious that I am not my history, I am aware that I am taking ownership of myself and my possibilities. For the audience it could be, for example, that that they acknowledge my experience, that they have been touched by my story and are making a connection to their own lives. In the moment of such a mutual sharing I may also more fully experience myself as whole and complete, and if this is not yet the case that I recognise and acknowledge that I am on the journey of becoming whole and complete. Sometimes this may be stated explicitly or it may be left implied and unspoken; either way the potential is being activated for the performer to meet the audience and for the encounter to happen. I believe I felt this in a moment of shared silence during my *Work-in-Progress*.



## CHAPTER FIVE - ZOOMING IT ALL BACK HOME

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualises and reflects upon *Nothing: An Experiment in Encounter* (hereafter referred to as *Nothing*), which is the monologue performance which accompanies and parallels this written element of the thesis. As the research process unfolded, what was originally envisaged as a single performance became a series of four iterations made in the spring of 2021 using the online, digital, video communications platform, *Zoom*. For the purposes of the thesis, I consider all but the last two performances of *Nothing* part of a developmental process. The final two I consider the thesis performance, shown on two consecutive nights. This was the first time in my performance career that I refined work in such a way over an extended period. The initial iteration was performed to one person who acted as a first ‘outside eye’, providing critical feedback. The second was made to the University of Plymouth Performance-Experience-Presence (PEP) research group in its PEP Talk seminar series (January 2021). The third iteration was to a small, invited group of family, friends and colleagues, with the specific intention of showing it as a work-in-progress and to receive their considered feedback about how the work might continue to develop (May 2021). The fourth, consisting of the final two performances, were to a far wider invited audience and constitute the final ‘thesis performance’ (June 2021); the script can be read in full in Appendix Eight. In this chapter, I examine the key elements and themes of this PaR performance, which play an important role more widely in the ongoing formation of identity and create a pathway to self-transformation.

Building on the first four chapters of this thesis, the performance elements I discuss include: story and narratives; time and place; identity and authenticity; self and persona, artistic, theatrical and dramaturgical choices. In this discussion, I compare and contrast my own performance to a recorded performance made by the performer Selina Thompson, *salt: dispersed* (2021), which was streamed to her audience's computers. I am choosing to include Thompson's performance here as it explores similar themes as I do in *Nothing*. Thompson explains that

[a] lot of salt. is to do with notions of home and diaspora. This idea of tracing back ancestry—looking back to where you belong and where it places you in the world. (2017: unpaginated)

Analysing *salt: dispersed* provides an opportunity to consider *Nothing* in a wider, contemporary theatrical context, and much like receiving audience feedback at the end of a scratch performance, it illuminates and provokes ideas for the development, improvement and advancement of my own performance delivery and text.

*Nothing* was intended as the culmination of my research about whether and how performing auto/biographically could expand and transform my own experience of living, unconstrained from burdens of past narratives. I discuss the nature of interaction between me as the performer and my audience who watched my performance, and how I come to understand that different kinds of encounter took place. I also explain how the performance was a transformational experience for me as a consequence of performing material about time and my ancestors, place and how I locate myself in the world, my sense of self and my identity, my inherited transgenerational narratives, my personal story and my intimate struggles.

## 5.2 Zoom Performance

In the winter of 2019 a new virus, COVID-19, was identified in Wuhan Province, China and, by early March 2020, a global pandemic was officially declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The entire population of the UK was ordered by the government into 'lockdown'.<sup>60</sup> Most retail outlets were closed indefinitely as were all public places of worship, recreation and entertainment including theatres and arts centres. The majority of working aged people and children of school age were obliged to stay at home. This meant that all and any plans I had made regarding the mounting of the final performance in a shared space had to be abandoned. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the social implications of the lockdown. However, as a direct consequence of the enforced long term, public confinement there was a massive increase in the use and acceptance of online performances connected via computers, using technology to link performers and their audiences. After waiting for about nine months and watching for any signals of permanent easing in the lockdown, I took the decision to make the thesis performance suitable for an online performance.

Along with others, such as W. B. Worthen, I began to think of this performance as *Zoom Theatre*. Worthen argues that 'theatre as a technology is always obsolescing' (2021: 182) but it is also highly adaptive 'construing old media forms alongside new ones' (2021: 183). He suggests that 'the defining genre of theatre during the pandemic emerges from an alternative technology, in which actors in different places all perform live, but remotely, typically from their homes, gathered on a single screen: *Zoom theatre*' (2021: 183). As the actor Stacy Keach remarks

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<sup>60</sup> Lockdown was the name given to the policy that ordered people to stay where they were and not venture out due to the risks associated to themselves and others if they were to move and interact freely. The terms 'stay-at-home' and 'shelter-in-place' were also used during this period.

Zoom theatre is a new language, a whole new way of expressing yourself as an actor [a]s time goes, we will all become more conversant and creative with, and less intimidated by, the technology. (in Miller, 2020: unpaginated)

Actor Edward Gero adds that ‘While *Zoom* offers both less scope and more intimacy than theatre, it’s more about vocal technique, like radio’ (in Miller, 2020: unpaginated). Indeed, this specific aspect of performing was an important feature of the thesis performance.

The *Zoom* software enables people to interact in real time<sup>61</sup> and to have live gatherings even when they are not physically present in the same place or space, such as a theatre. Using *Zoom* means that performances can be staged live to an audience and do not need to be recorded, although it is possible to make a recording for future viewing. In this case, I have used the recording to analyse both my performance and the audience feedback. Moreover, and advantageous from an entirely personal point of view, the sudden upsurge of acceptance of online gatherings, including performances, allowed me to invite and include people from around the world to be part of my audience. Under more usual circumstances they would have been unlikely to attend. One slight disadvantage is that, due to the manner which I chose to promote the performance, I precluded the participation of unknown spectators who otherwise might have attended a live performance at a festival, for example. The platform itself is in fact equipped to accommodate many ‘strangers’, through a wide range of online promotion and ticket booking facilities. Audience members are able to participate and interact with the performer, if so wanted, through the use of the audio and text facilities (microphones and chat) that the *Zoom* software provides. While these structures mark out significant differences from more conventional styles of theatre performance, *Zoom* can nonetheless be a ‘here-and-now’ experience for both performer and audience.

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<sup>61</sup> Real time means the actual time during which a process or event occurs.

## 5.3 Genesis of Nothing: An Experiment in Encounter

### 5.3.1 First Iteration: One- to-One

The first iteration of what eventually became the thesis performance took place using *Zoom*, to my brother in Israel, who is familiar with my previous work, and has often proved to be a 'sounding board' for my early ideas, acting as an auditor and listener.

In a moment of inspiration I had woken one morning with ideas for a new script. I spontaneously wrote down the entire text, which consisted of about fifty instructions and questions to the audience, punctuated with long silences. I also had the name of the performance, *Nothing: An Experiment in Encounter*. This name was deliberate and specific in its intention: it was to be an experiment; there were elements of solo auto/biographical theatre I wanted to test including transmission and 'beyond technique'. I wanted to discover what it might take to occupy a performance space of 'nothing', to be in the moment, present, without expectation. I viewed the performance itself as an occasion of reflection and meditation designed deliberately to provoke a spiritual encounter. I performed it in full, to my brother who has his own commitment to meditation and spiritual life; in that sense he was my ideal first audience. However, the performance made clear to both of us that it failed, especially in terms of inviting the audience to participate in a dialogue.

Tim Etchells states that 'it's generally true that as watchers we enjoy reaching through something to find something. We don't necessarily enjoy the train driving right at us' (in Giannachi and Kaye, 2006: unpaginated). The words I had written did not transfer from the page to the stage. They occurred as sterile and lacking humanity. For both of us, the experience was that the words were 'driving right at' the audience. On reading aloud for the

first time, it sounded more like a poorly written sermon from a censorious preacher, than an invitation from an empathetic performer. Rather than leading to a possible encounter it was simply a series of injunctions and admonishments that were more likely to leave the audience feeling offended and belittled. I abandoned the project as I had conceived it, in particular I dropped the idea of deliberately attempting to invoke encounter, and started again, well in advance of my scheduled PEP session. This failure was certainly an essential prerequisite to the final success of the thesis performance. Sara Jane Bailes observes that only in live performance are we given the opportunity to rehearse the experience of failure 'without the catastrophe of its event' (2011: xvi). Failure is simply one of the possibilities inherent in performance that makes new learning available.

I began again, allowing myself a period of reflection which Moustakas calls indwelling: 'the process of turning inward' (1990: 24). Margolin suggests that '[b]y sheer dint of spiritual gravity, the writer tends to drop deeper and deeper, surprising herself' (1997: 72). The process of dropping deeper revealed five key questions:

- How do I draw on everything I have learned or discovered?
- How do I build on previous performances?
- How do I move towards integrating five years of practice?
- How do I include what is not visible in the written element of the thesis?
- How do I catalyse a self-transformation?

Intuitively, and not in logical sequence, I formulated these responses:

- Make it obviously auto/biographical. Draw on historically meaningful personal and transgenerational stories and narratives, in such a way that the performance demonstrates my overcoming or triumph over, and liberation from, the weight of these tales.

- Manipulate, and play with, time and place so that the stability of memory, history, and the past is problematised for me and for the audience. Introduce people to places that are unfamiliar, such that they are challenged to consider/reconsider their cultural assumptions.
- Question fixed ideas about self and myself. Destabilise current, unexamined, commonly held ideas about self and identity. Evacuate myself (do not be attached to the truth of the stories of my past). So that a persona can take the stage, make the world of the persona seem as close as possible to the actual world of the performer. Allow the persona to let the audience see into the performer's inner life. Let the persona be 'authentic', that is, reveal the possibilities and potential of the performer's life and future to the audience. Let the persona know more than the performer.
- Create an artistic and aesthetic experience for the audience. Be provocative and galvanise emotions. Challenge the audience to experience something they have never experienced before. Interrogate the status quo. Transport the audience to a new location/perspective. Arouse curiosity. Raise awareness. Take people on a journey that is unexpected, to places that are simultaneously inner and outer.

### **5.3.2 Second Iteration: The PEP Performance**

The second iteration, developed for the PEP research group, was a clear articulation of the responses to the questions and as such was the first recognisable version of *Nothing*. It was performed using *Zoom*, in this instance, because the seminar series had moved online as a result of the pandemic. At this stage of development, I realised that to successfully make

solo auto/biographical theatre on *Zoom*, to reach and touch the audience, meant focussing on a text-based performance.

The techniques I used in re-writing the script were actively influenced by Deb Margolin. First, using Margolin's description, I approached this script as a composition (1997: 68): it was deliberately arranged; it had form and structure; it combined politics, philosophy, and psychotherapy; it merged my auto/biography with the biography of others. It also blended different languages. In particular, I drew on Margolin's assertion that '[p]erformance doesn't require a plot, the actor is the plot' (1997: 68). Not needing a plot, but being the plot, allowed me to play with time and space, moving from the present (27<sup>th</sup> January 2021) to the beginning of November 2020, and then back to 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021, from there to the 1960s and back to the catastrophic events of the 1940s, and then forward again to 2010s, and a return to the present.<sup>62</sup>

The performance of the new script began with the same song that had been part of the performances in 2017 and 2018 - *The Whole Entire World / Kol Ha'Olam Kulo* - sung in both Hebrew and in English.<sup>63</sup> It was included again, to indicate that this was a performance not a standard academic paper. This time the song was delivered with far more confidence, and without explanations or excuses for my singing voice as it had been previously. Indeed, overall my performance skills had improved since my performance in Israel in 2018, and this piece was firmly informed by Ken Campbell's and Spalding Gray's technique of speaking directly to the audience using an informal, conversational style. However, watching the recording, several months later, it is apparent that this was not yet at a consistent level of

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<sup>62</sup> November 2020 was the month of the 59<sup>th</sup> presidential election in the USA; 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 was the date that the US House of Representatives was scheduled to hold the count of the Electoral College ballots cast and certify the winner of the election. It was the day that citizens of the USA stormed the Capitol building to protest the defeat at the elections of Donald J. Trump, seemingly with the intention of disrupting and ultimately overturning the decision of the election.

<sup>63</sup> The song in Hebrew is by Rabbi Baruch Chait adapted from the original epigram attributed to the Hasidic Rabbi Nachman of Breslov b. 1772 d. 1810.



‘beyond technique’; it does not seem to occur ‘just in the moment’ or ‘off the top of my head’. It is clear that I am still reading the script and generating my self - and my performance - from it.

Not only was I consciously making a piece of text-based work, but in the three years since performing at the *Machon* Reunion in Israel, I had also learned to be far more aware of what I was doing with my body in performance, what I was symbolising or signaling to the audience. In this performance, I also began to experiment with these new techniques and adapt them to performing on *Zoom*. Throughout the performance I began to practice moving my body towards and away from the camera to invite moments of more or less intimacy, through proximity and distance. I use my hands for emphasis and I use tilts or nods of my head and clenches in my jaw to highlight moments of intensity or drama. I was aware that I was rocking in my chair, as if I was adopting the traditional swaying movements of praying in synagogue, called *davening* in the Jewish tradition. *Davening* is not just the opening of the lips to recite prayers; it also has a connotation of opening the heart.

Margolin writes that she has ‘often said that the theatre is the only place where you have the unimpeachable right to stare at strangers’ (1997: 69). This ‘unimpeachable right’ is accentuated on *Zoom*. In this performance, I began to learn to use my eyes in different ways: I look straight at camera when I am speaking directly to the audience. I hold my gaze when I want to indicate that I want them to stop and consider what I have just said; I use my eyes to signal that I am thinking or pondering on an idea or a puzzle by peering into an undefined space ahead of me. I look up to see/visualise the past, and I look down when I want to represent an inner experience or an emotion.

### 5.3.3 Third Iteration: Scratch Performance

For the third iteration of *Nothing*, my online audience of eight people were situated in Israel and across the U.K. They were each in their own homes watching me perform on their computer screen. I was making this performance specifically to prepare for the thesis performance, with the intention of receiving feedback and ideas for improvement. I had invited people who knew the progression of my work and whose judgment I trusted. These people were emotionally intelligent and artistically aware.<sup>64</sup> Without exception they all had their own experience of personal growth and self-transformation. My invitation located the audience as active spectators, not passive recipients, as partners and co-creators - committedly bearing witness. By 'bearing witness', they willingly had the opportunity to acknowledge and share their own associations and experience, freely participating in each others' lives. Allain notes that Grotowski, 'in Polish, talks about the spectator not the audience, so it is singular. It is never homogenous; it's never the audience as a total body of people. It's always about that one-to-one relationship' (in Cleaves, 2017: unpaginated).

*Zoom* has two options for viewing: a gallery view in which everyone in the gathering can be seen throughout, or speaker view in which the person speaking at any given time occupies the largest portion of the screen and the others are seen in much smaller images. My audience was free to watch in whichever view they preferred. They were also free to turn off their own cameras if they did not want to be seen on screen at all. Just as some spectators choose to use opera glasses during a conventional performance, and others not, it is the performer's 'reading' of the audience that makes a difference to their (the performer's)

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<sup>64</sup> According to author Daniel Goleman, the American psychologist, whose books helped to popularize emotional intelligence, this includes self-awareness and empathy (1995: 43).

experience. As the performer, I did not know in which mode they were watching me but in moments of silence I was able to 'read' whether 'the audience were watching me or being with me' (Whalley and Miller, 2017: 117). In this performance I chose to experiment by watching myself perform in speaker mode. This meant that I was able to attend more carefully to my own facial and visual expression, my physicality, and my demeanour. Thus, the audience were less prominent to me.

This visual mode can act as a mirror providing instantaneous 'thin-slice' feedback (Gladwell, 2005: 23). Thin-slicing is the unconscious human ability to recognise 'patterns in situations and behaviour based on very narrow slices of experience' (Gladwell, 2005: 23). Access to this rapid feedback mechanism began to make it possible for me to be far more aware of what the audience was viewing and to begin consciously to deepen my technique on *Zoom*. This is an opportunity that had not been afforded by my previous live performances where my visual attention was not focused on myself but on the reactions and responses of the audience.

I performed in front of a solid, plain black backdrop. This was a deliberate choice to indicate to people who regularly see me online in my study, in front of a painting on the wall, that what was happening was something different. I chose to continue wearing a University of Plymouth sweatshirt for my costume, joining the performance to the PhD, connecting me as a student to me as a performer, and linking me as a 72-year-old to me as a young man. It also creates a sense of continuity between previous performances and this one, just as Spalding Gray's plaid, flannel shirts have become an integral and immediately recognisable part of his performances. What I did not take into account was how the new backdrop changed the visual experience of proximity and distance in relationship to the computer and seemed to bring me much closer to the camera. This resulted in some moments of making

my movements blurry or fuzzy. This was new knowledge that, once discovered, I took into the next performances.

For this performance I rewrote the script with a deliberate strategy to avoid linearity and to break up the sense of temporal continuity, to devise something that was experiential rather than factual and to create a context within which each person watching could reach their own conclusions according to their own meaning-making. I did this by intentionally pointing to the fragility, instability and unpredictability of life. The text was intended to induce an appreciation that when one confronts life together with others, and allows life *to be, as it is*, the performance may give rise to connection and community, and thereby promote a sense of belonging to something both tangible and enduring. My goal was to perform as if this were 'off the top of my head'. While I knew I would be 'generating' from the script I did not plan this as a read-through, rather as a performance that despite being read, brings into existence a vital, dynamic and energetic piece of work; one that transmits something essential about the story, and potentially presents possibility, transformation and encounter in the moment. I drew on an example of a performer using a script on stage without detracting from the vitality by watching a recorded excerpt of Deb Margolin performing *8 Stops* (2014a).

My revisions took into account four contextual changes since the previous iteration. First, my performance skills, particularly on *Zoom*, had improved. Next, I adjusted dates to reflect that time had passed since the first performance. Third, the context of the performance and the make up of the audience was very different. Whereas, the PEP Talk performance had been academically slanted for an audience of teachers, faculty members, students and researchers, this scratch performance was offered to an audience of peers who had been asked specifically to participate in a critique of the work. My intention was to fold the audience feedback into the final thesis performances.

Much of the feedback focused on the improvement of my singing. Additionally a number of people offered specific and valuable avenues of development, including the recommendation that I 'extend the intricacies' of my new found 'singing voice' to my enunciation and to the delivery of the text, thus making the detail and the intention of the narrative clearer and more precise. The text included references to US President Trump and to the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime during World War II, and it was also suggested that I work toward 'more balance, less Trump and Auschwitz, and more hope'. Another suggestion was to think about the composition of the entire piece from a musical perspective; and to allow myself to play more widely with nonlinearity, to 'shuffle' the themes, repetitions, and dynamics of speed, volume, rhythm and tempo. One person commented that

the detail of the mosaic was amazing and the picture you shared allowed a million lives to come and be present with you ... you created an innermost experience for so many lives to come and be with you ... of which we are all part ... a participant, and a projection ... the journey you took, took us on and in, with you, allowed a million lives in each of us to be resonant with you.

This was precisely what I had intended with the revised text - that is, to take the audience on two journeys, through words and song, my journey and their own.

'Journeyers' in life are frequently confronted by uncertainty, forced to make decisions, impose meaning, overcome obstacles, take diversions, until they rediscover their direction and their route. In this context one audience member called the performance 'dream like, bending metaphor and history'. While journeying in life, events might occur as disjointed, fragmented, incoherent. Sometimes the coherence and the unity only appear well after the events themselves, when they can be viewed from a distance. This was reflected by another audience member who described 'things that kept going in and out of focus, but by the end

you had created a holding to say the things you wanted to say, and we were all there with you.'

Stories and memories often fluctuate between the distant past and the present, the recent past and the near future. We can feel close or far away from memories irrespective of time passing (Kyung et al., 2010: 217). We vary in our sense of recall between the outline of a memory or remembering it in detail. The text of *Nothing* was deliberately not linear, drawing on close and distant memories, recent and distant pasts. However, from a distance the script told a coherent, personal, story. For example, in its opening moments it moves from a song with ancient words and a modern melody, to recent cultural references, to present day politics, to more philosophical or transcendent ideas, and back to my own autobiography, before it repeats a similar cycle. Using McKee's methods of inciting-incidents, set-up and return, each thought that is seeded earlier on is completed by the end of the performance. I use these seeds as indicators of key motifs in the story, so that the audience will recognise them as they return later on in the performance these included: history, memory and freedom, motifs also seem central to Selina Thompson's one-woman performance *salt: dispersed*.

#### **5.4 salt: dispersed**

There are some thematic overlaps between Thompson's performance and my own, and viewing her work was an important moment in the research. Seeing someone else's similar work as spectator deepened my understanding of the research process, my practice and self-transformation. It enabled me to identify a number of performance techniques and devices that allow a better understanding of how my own practice is operating.

In this performance, Thompson is the storyteller. As witnesses to her story we accept her as a reliable narrator and her account as an honest expression of her experience. She traces her voyage by cargo ship around, what she terms, the 'Transatlantic Slave Triangle' from Britain to Ghana to Jamaica and back to the UK (Thompson, 2018).

Thompson's themes include colonialism and enslavement, power, control and oppression, anger and grief, diaspora, home and homelessness, contemporary Black British identity and modern racism. She relates how, even on board ship she directly and personally experiences both racism and sexism. She recounts how the Italian captain of the ships refers to her as 'n\*\*\*\*\*', while standing outside her cabin door' (Thompson, 2021, unpaginated).

Even though I have experienced some incidents of antisemitism in my life, none have ever approached the degree of enmity or hatred that Thompson recounts and while we share the fact of having predecessors who were immigrants to the UK, my ancestors were not enslaved in recent memory in the same way Thompson's were. The Jewish immigrant experience is different, and being white in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is different. Being white in a predominantly white society implies a certain type of insulation from racial stress. I am a white man with a white frame of reference and a white world view. I rarely experience what could be called racial discomfort. Thompson's is an entirely different experience than my own.

While I draw on Jewish and minority themes to make my performances, which are in the main to predominantly white audiences, it simply does not occur to me to analyse 'my whiteness'. For Thompson, however, the experience of being a black woman in a white society is tangible; she describes it as a 'life long exposure to racism' and she states categorically that the experience is 'traumatic'(Thompson, 2021, unpaginated). And yet, despite these hugely differing backgrounds, both of our thematic concerns, our stagecraft and

dramaturgy feature similarities that arise from a solo auto/biographical process of self-discovery.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into a detailed discussion about the impact of whiteness on my performance, however, I do recognise that it is perhaps my 'whiteness' that allows me the 'luxury' of focussing on inner transformational processes, rather than attending more directly and with more immediacy, to social transformation across a wide range of issues, including racism. I readily acknowledge that there are profound differences in the impact of power, prejudice and racism on someone like me who is white and male and Thompson who is black and a woman. I am not attempting here, in any way to *equate* my personal history with hers. My experience of watching Thompson perform is that she has a more overtly political and social agenda than I. Indeed she specifically asks in reference of her 2018 performance *Oh God Not Another One*, (East Street Arts, Birmingham 2020) 'Can we do politics better than those who claim to do it for us? Will we change the world?' (Thompson, n.d. c: unpaginated).

Thompson is drawing on her ancestral and family origin narratives, which she describes on her website as 'a long journey backwards in order to go forwards', to raise awareness and to contribute directly and immediately to processes of social transformation. In this case the elimination of racism. This differs from my practice, where the focus is first of all on eliminating the grip that the past has on one's thrownness. The freedom that my practice promotes is a sense of inner freedom. I am not asking can I change the world, rather how can I change myself first - in such a way that I am not operating from my thrownness, but thereby have more choices, a wider perspective and as a consequence more freedom to act in the world. I have called this way of being free, 'beyond technique', knowing oneself as being whole and complete, as having a story but not being one's story. My practice suggests



that this way of being make possible an encounter with an-other, and for both to experience that there is no other.

While I am drawing on my Jewish cultural roots to tell my story, to quieten my inner conflicts and to make sense of my location in the world, Thompson's stories are drawn from her own social and cultural background. While our two worlds are seemingly very different - me, a white older Jewish man with family roots in Poland and Romania; she, a younger black woman finding her origins in Jamaica and Monserrat – each of these auto/biographical performances expresses in its unique way a yearning for freedom ( one of the most central tenets of Judaism); a longing for justice; and a search for home and belonging. Sarah Gorman's interpretation is that *salt: dispersed* 'fulfils a profound need and is driven by a desire to find a way of quieting [Thompson's] sense of unease about what it means to live as part of the African diaspora in contemporary Britain' (Gorman, 2019: unpaginated).

In my experience as a spectator, the quality which was most evident throughout the performance was that which Tim Etchells calls investment. Etchells asserts that

[i]nvestment is what happens when the performers before us seem bound up unspeakably with what they're doing—it seems to matter to them [...] to touch them, in some quiet and terrible way. Investment is the bottom line—without it nothing matters [...] Investment is the line of connection between performer and their text or their task. When it works it is private, and often on the very edge of words. Like all the best performance it is before us, but not for us [...] This privacy of investment doesn't make a solipsistic work or a brick wall to shut the watchers out. Quite the opposite—investment draws us in. Something is happening—real and therefore risked—something seems to slip across from the private world to the public one—and the performers are 'left open' or 'left exposed'. (1999: 48)

My experience of Thompson's performance is that her 'investment' merges presence and authenticity, and emerges, as I highlighted in the previous chapter, not as an enigmatic, metaphysical phenomenon, but rather as what Paul Macneill calls an 'emanation of a force

field' (2014: 137). Thompson's investment - her anger and her sense of injustice - is a physically enacted energy on stage and is responded to viscerally by the audience. Etchells' passage above captures, for me, the spirit of Thompson's solo auto/biographical performance, *salt: dispersed*.<sup>65</sup>

As I wrote earlier, Thompson identifies as 'a Black, working class, queer, fat woman' (Thompson, 2019: unpaginated). She states that she makes 'work with those subjectivities in mind' and that she is 'part of a community here that sees its identities as powerful, political, and urgent places to create from' (2019: unpaginated). Thompson makes work 'because it's the only way I can live. It's the only way I can bear how awful everything is and how powerless I feel about that a lot of the time' (in Gorman, 2019: unpaginated).

Compared to *Nothing*, Thompson's theatre is extremely physical. In one of the most memorable scenes in the monologue, Thompson highlights the immediate racial hierarchy of the ship she travels on - the officers are Italian, the crew is Filipino, and the two black women passengers are confined to the bottom of the hierarchy of power - and places this microcosm in a much wider, global context. She uses a sledgehammer to smash the hierarchy, symbolised by a huge salt crystal that she pulverises and scatters across the stage. She then arranges the chunks and fragments into a line of ever smaller pieces. Her actions, of swinging the sledgehammer, her repeated movements back and forth across the stage and her obvious lack of breath are suggestive and reminiscent of enslaved black Africans using weeding hoes to clear soil, or threshers to hull rice, or scythes to cut the sugar beet on the plantations in the west Indies and the southern states of the USA. Wearing an all-white dress, a reminder of

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<sup>65</sup> Thompson's office informed me that *Salt* (sometimes stylised *salt* or *salt.*) is the name of the written play and the theatrical performance. *Salt* is also the name of the BBC Arena piece, although this is very different from the performance. *salt: dispersed* is the video adaptation of the theatrically performed play, It is also the version I first watched and am analysing here.

the aprons worn by enslaved women forced to work in white households, and the smocks of those compelled to travail in the fields, her costume conjures historical images of subjugated life on the white plantations. The visible effort required, and the obvious fatigue and breathlessness Thompson displays, connect her - and the audience bearing witness - with immediacy to the living reality of a life of enslavement. On a BBC television documentary about *salt*, Thompson describes, how she ‘always wanted to allude to the work that people who were enslaved were doing all of the time - sweeping, breaking rocks and digging up land [...] and I wanted to be exhausted in the show’ (in Salt, 2021). She explains how ‘the labour of negotiating racism all the time takes a toll on the body and isn’t always seen’, and how she intended in the performance to make that labour ‘really visible, really manifest’ (in Salt, 2021).

This connection, between enslavement and contemporary racism is compounded and amplified by the text - the use of a rhythmic, repetitive incantation - that is redolent of cumulative songs like *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, *Bog Down in the Valley* ‘O, Bob Dylan’s *Who Killed Davy Moore*, and the Jewish *Echad Mi Yodea* (*Who Knows One?*) sung in celebration of freedom from enslavement at the end of the Passover meal.<sup>66</sup> Thompson’s rhyme moves with her from rock to rock, and as she swings her hammer reciting

this is capitalism [...] racism, imperialism [...] that decides who matters and who will live [...] built on violence [...] it shakes the States [...] which corrupt the Unions [...] which grinds down the Master[ ...] who polices the Officers [...] who alienate the Crew [...] who terrorize the (two black) Women [...] she’s shouting at me, I’m shouting at her [...] and we’re still at sea in the morning. (Salt, 2021)

Repetition is a technique I also use. Thompson employs it with effect throughout her performance to ‘drive home’ her message. For example, ‘Europe pushes against me, I push back’ is used repeatedly to emphasis her daily, embodied, lived experience. Thompson speaks

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<sup>66</sup> Passover or Pesach in Hebrew is a celebration of the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt. It is a Spring festival and is one of the most important dates in the Jewish calendar.

directly to her audience, and this repetition accentuates my understanding of her anger, frustration and pain. Gorman suggests that this kind of

performance works against an ideology of individualism and demonstrates how sharing an experience has the potential to raise awareness of the impact of oppressive social and economic forces, provide a point of identification and galvanise foster a sense of community. (2019: unpaginated)

Thompson is not just describing, but invoking through ritual, how she, and everyone else involved in her story, are all inadvertently caught up in an invisible matrix of persecution and oppression that perpetuates racism, sexism, injustice, inequality and hatred. Moreover, by asking people sitting in the first few front rows of the theatre to put on safety goggles as she pulverises the rock, she is surreptitiously inviting everyone in the audience to consider how they too might be playing a part in the system.

Just as in my own work stories of place and family origins play a central part in my performances, so too in Thompson's storytelling. 'I am from Birmingham U.K.', she states at the opening of *Salt*

My mother and father are both Rastafarians from Jamaica who moved to the U.K. when they were thirteen, the parents who adopted me, my mum and dad, were both born in the U.K. with parents from Jamaica and Montserrat, and we are all descended from enslaved people. (*Salt*, 2021)

*salt: dispersed* also moves, often rapidly, between different cities in Great Britain, locations en-route round the triangle of enslavement including Antwerp, Tema in Ghana, and Kingston, Jamaica. Thompson's account of her journey resonate with my discussion in Chapter Three concerning one's relationship to place, and the grip that place, land and landscape can impose on one's life. Thompson demonstrates how this technique, of invoking place, invites the audience to actively make two simultaneous journeys during the performance: the first along with the performer; the second, their own, through their personal associations, memories and imagination.

Thompson also uses her text to play with temporality. An example of this is when, before listing all the dates on which she has encountered bigotry and racism on the streets of various cities around the U.K., she tells the audience that '[t]ime accumulates' and later states that she is 'jumping forward in time' (Thompson, 2021: unpaginated). In interview, she states

the idea that time doesn't move forward and progress but accumulates, gathering around one fixed spot. That's what being part of a diaspora feels like - it's that sense of having a body that holds the slave trade, holds colonialism, holds the civil rights movement in America, holds Black Lives Matter, holds the New Cross fire that happened in London. There's no catharsis for a story about the diaspora or a story about race because none of it's finished, none of it's resolved or dealt with, it's just held. What you're always negotiating is how you can hold it. (in Cleaves, n.d.: unpaginated)

Foucault has referred to this kind of negotiation as 'trying to make a diagnostic of the present, to tell what we are today' (in Fisher and Gotman, 2020: 8). At the close of *salt: dispersed*, Thompson states that she has made a commitment to continue to live, and she asks the audience to join her in that commitment.

My performance of *Nothing* similarly and deliberately plays with proximity and distance both in time and space by consistently merging and/or shifting anecdotes and stories from different time periods and geographic locations or places; seeding and setting up the stories, then letting them hang, incomplete, until returning later to complete them. By the end, I wanted the audience to overcome any sense of discontinuity or incoherence and to feel close to the issues, close to each other and close to me. Personally, I wanted to create distance from stale, unwanted narratives and closer to new possibilities. I wanted us all to experience our common humanity and human being-ness. I wanted to create the sense of us all being in one room. Particularly by using the text, singing and speaking directly to everyone watching, I aspired to reducing the barriers we construct to differentiate ourselves from one another. Despite the physical distances I hoped to promote proximity, community and encounter.

## 5.5 The Final Thesis Performance

Although I always imagined that the performance would be about my personal journey towards spiritual and artistic integrity, I had not anticipated how the devising process would take me 'down' through layers of unfamiliar emotional pathways, that included exploring and re-exploring forgotten exits from people and places, through feelings of abandonment and isolation, and through memories of separation and exclusion. As a result of this intensity and what Moustakas calls 'indwelling' or turning inward to discover a more comprehensive understanding of events and their meaning (1990: 24), the performance eventually became deeper, more meaningful and more freeing. The kind of knowledge the performance aimed to produce was not empirical, not objective facts or data, it was more akin to *a posteriori* knowing, knowledge a person acquires on deep reflection of an experience (Nelson, 2006: 106). My aim was that the performance would a/ leave me with a sense of transformation and liberation, and b/ leave the audience, with their own personal experience as well as questions to dwell in and to grapple with thereafter.

The central components of the new and final version of *Nothing* remained the same as the previous scratch performance - merging auto/biographical narratives and stories of time and place, with politics and philosophy. I took the feedback from the scratch performance, made a number of additions and edits to the text and went into an intense period of rehearsing. By this point I had fully committed to performing from a prepared and rehearsed script. I was not planning to jettison the script and to improvise, ad lib or extemporise. I felt that I had ample time to prepare, practise and revise, and as I have discussed, this was the first time I had performed the same piece publicly several times, thus taking informed and conscious steps to reach a work that felt fulfilling. This constitutes a

major difference from any of the previous performances I have discussed thus far. It is also different from performing *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* insofar as that performance, while it was scripted, contained far more physical action and movement and far less spoken word.

My discovery that, in 1929, Heidegger announced '*Das Nichts selbst nichtet*' or 'The Nothing itself noths' (Inwood, 1999: 271) provided a springboard for a new opening to the monologue. This short but profound phrase seemed to me to connect all the different aspects of the text; not only to what I wanted to share about Heidegger's influence on my practice, but also to my experience in the *est* training, to my understanding of Buber's encounter and to my thinking about self-transformation. Moreover, studying the works of Deb Margolin expanded my confidence to include more difficult philosophical or mystical ideas and concepts without worrying whether I would 'lose the audience' along the way or being concerned about rallying their agreement or approval.

The script was written and constructed to display the discoveries of my entire research process. It is reiterative in the sense that the themes are cyclical, appearing and reappearing throughout the performance. The opening suggests themes of spirituality and ritual. It draws in concepts from Grotowski and introduces the ideas of meeting and encounter. I use Donovan Leitch's 1967 song, *First There is a Mountain*, early in the performance, to reinforce the notions of transformation, transience, impermanence and uncertainty, which the lyrics express metaphorically (see Appendix Eight, Section 3: i-iv). I complete the section with a declarative statement to the audience that integrates everything that has been brought into the performance thus far. I then paraphrase a quote from Giles Deleuze (1988) to meld being and time and to open a passageway from now to the 1960s, from myself in the present to myself as a teenager (see Appendix Eight, Section 4: i-viii). This is consolidated by the same Hebrew and English song as has been described in previous performances, *The Whole Entire*

*World / Kol Ha'Olam Kulo*, about the precariousness of life and living (see Appendix Eight, Section 5: i).

Continuing the exploration of the 'grip' of place in my life, which began with *Untitled Work* in Israel, the next section merges place - Devon and Israel - and time - now and the 1970s - and fuses them to the politics of 2021. I use a fragment of the poem *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock* by T. S. Eliot (1940: 9), to amalgamate these elements as a cohesive whole (see Appendix Eight, Sections 5-6). The next section uses the text to mingle time, place and trans-generational narratives. It introduces the concepts of auto/biography and identity, and I (the character Mo) take the audience, through stories, on a journey through time, back to 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, thence to Rome and Palestine of the second century and I link stories of my ancestors with historical myths. I forge them together with current events and contemporary politics and return to the 1960s. I link the performance to my thesis and connect my key interlocutors through contestation and controversy (see Appendix Four, Sections 7-10).

Finally, I return at the end of the script to Noth-ing; to nothing and be-ing, to being and transformation, and to possibilities for the future, with the intention of leaving the audience with a sense of wholeness and completion, and in a place of optimism and possibility for themselves and for the world (see Appendix Eight, Section 25-28). Throughout the performance, I employ the technique of speaking directly to the audience. I reveal to them, and involve them in some of my innermost challenges, which include: how to genuinely feel grounded in a place; how to experience being rooted in a community, how to be at home within myself. I do this in both the hope and anticipation that they may also look at their own challenges (see Appendix Eight, Sections 19-23).



Loosely following Grotowski's technique of devising an ethnodrama (see section 2.6), I chose songs that linked specifically to my family's cultural, spiritual and political traditions and to important moments of experience in my own past. I selected songs that would recreate the conditions of the time, and allow me to reconnect with the vitality and intensity of my emotional life at that time (Grotowski, 2001: 302; Laster, 2016: 17). The stories I tell are linked to and augmented by the songs. Taken together, I intend to create a conversation that is not bound to a particular era. The themes of the stories are understood to endure over time, and are echoed and amplified by the themes of the songs. I also use the songs in the performance to break up the spoken word and to vary the pace and tempo of the performance. I connect the stories and the songs to my own personal journey through life and to my own process of self-transformation.

Working closely with these songs allowed me, very directly, to contact and reconnect with images, associations, sensations, feelings and emotions and of the times I had first encountered them. This acted as springboards from which to write the text, discovering as Kris Salata calls it, 'the song within' (2013: 179-180). Mario Biagini emphasises that

The songs we are working on are tools, let's say, a means to help one to arrive into the moment. And, also, to help one be next to another human being, without any fear, so that inside oneself, [...] one discovers that *there is nothing to hide*. (in Shevtsova, 2009: 338, my emphasis)

I worked with my voice coach and artistic director, Lucinda Allen, on merging the songs and singing into the spoken text so that they formed a spine to the work, and the piece had a sense of flow, integrity and cohesion. I worked with Allen on developing my vocal skills, expressing the emotionality of the songs, and on connecting the pitch of the prose to the key of the tunes. Allen and I focused on the text, the words and the sound of the words. I was endeavouring to create a very simple 'acoustic scenography' (Curtin and Roesner, 2015: 109),

which would compensate for the sterility of a computer screen and compliment the sparseness and simplicity of my *Zoom* stage. Furthermore, building on the feedback from the scratch performance, we identified that using my voice - not just volume, but pitch, modulation, tone, timbre, rhythm - could be employed more effectively to vary the delivery of the monologue, in order to 'pull the audience in' and sustain their experience throughout the performance. The aim of these rehearsals was to learn to say the words as they are and as they mean - for example, the words 'truth' or 'abandonment' would be spoken with vulnerability, words like 'problem' or 'noose' would be spoken negatively.

I consciously decided that, because it was a long monologue, almost 11,000 words, and a performance without much activity or movement, that I was not going to attempt to memorise the words rather I would familiarise myself with, and learn, the script in such a way that I would inhabit and embody it, with a view to reading it during the performance, at a level that attempted to approach, 'beyond technique' and to discover something more about it. A considerable part of my practice at this time consisted of rehearsing in front of the computer screen, on *Zoom* by myself, watching myself perform, speak, sing and move consciously and intentionally, observing my facial and eye movements in detail. Additionally, I began working with an autocue / teleprompter: a software programme which would project an enlarged image of my script on to the screen in front of me as I was speaking. This enabled me to read the script while appearing to be looking directly at the audience. The script remained invisible to the audience. This practise was important in elevating the skills and techniques I would need to perform authentically using *Zoom*. I am using authenticity here not in its Heideggerian context but in its more customary (see section 4.3), theatrical sense of performing in a way that is believable or truthful. Practising using a teleprompter, to perform in this way, in public, included many hours each day of reading the script on the teleprompter

and becoming so familiarised with all the words that I 'owned' the text. I became the script. Reading the text became an embodied experience, there was no distance between me and my words, reading gradually became as if I was speaking the words for the first time, each time. Indeed, I consider this process of intensive rehearsing as creating an expanded opening to performing 'beyond technique' and to provide me with a more assured ontological and emotional platform on which to accomplish meeting, connection and self-transformation.

In the past, people using a tele-prompter or autocue generally learned to work in partnership with the operator. As a pair they discover how to proceed in sync, so that the operator moves the tele-prompter as the speaker delivers their material. In this case, I was both the speaker and the operator. Nonetheless, it took extraordinary and protracted preparation, practice and coordination to accomplish this level of coordination of eye, hand and breath, of reading and speaking and moving. I began by experimenting with fonts of different sizes: investigating which size made it easiest to read as the words were moving automatically up the screen. Next, I experimented with speed, noticing how fast or slowly I needed my lines to move in order that words did not disappear off the screen before I had spoken them. Because different sections of the script were delivered at different speeds and in different rhythms, I then shortened every line on the screen to a few words or a single phrase, using the space bar on the computer to create actual gaps between the lines, so that each section operated independently, matching my intended delivery style. This was particularly true, and exceptionally difficult, for the songs. When I had arranged the script in precise accordance with the performance, I reverted to manual operation, rather than automatic, and took back control of the movement of the words on the screen. This seemingly small technical decision restored a sense of agency and allowed me to feel that I would be able to 'let-go' into the performance and bring me closer to a sense of performing 'beyond

technique'. It was my hope that 'beyond technique' and blending of story, song and body would communicate my 'investment' in the performance to the audience much as Thompson's had been transmitted to me.

## 5.6 Audience and Audience Relations

In preparation for the final thesis performances, audience members received a poetic invitation suggesting *9 Ways to View the Performance* (see Appendix Seven) in an attempt to create a shared framework for viewing. People were joining the performance in different time zones: I was performing in the UK in the early evening; people to the west of me (USA and Canada) were watching in the morning or the afternoon; people to the east of me (Israel) were later at night; and to the far east (Australia and New Zealand) some were already into the early morning of the next day. For someone it was spring, for another it was autumn. Some were watching in the centre of American, Australian or Canadian cities others in rural villages in Israel or England. One was in a kitchen, another a bedroom a third a living room. Some were watching alone; others were with someone else. What difference does this make to the viewing/witnessing experience? Schechner proposed almost forty years ago that

surrounding a show are special observances, practises and rituals that lead into the performance and away from it. Not only getting to the theatre district, but entering the building itself involves ceremony: ticket taking, passing through the gates, performing rituals, finding a place from which to watch. (2003: 189)

With Zoom, there are other 'rituals' of gathering, and some of the impact on the audience was reflected in the comments people made at the end of *Nothing*.

Throughout the performance I used pauses in speaking and extended periods of silence to both emphasis moments of uncertainty and to allow the audience to experience the uncertainty for themselves. Moreover, like Thompson, all through the performance I also

used repetition, assonance, rhythm and rhyme to create impact, add or emphasise meaning, spark imagination, and to develop a sense of unity between diverse ideas.

When the autocue programme is used in conjunction with *Zoom* it is possible to watch both screens simultaneously. As I performed, I had a split-screen in front of me, the script - set to manual-scrolling on my left - and a gallery view of the audience on my right. Clicking too heavily on the script screen instantaneously removed the *Zoom* screen. This happened several times during the performance, and losing sight of my audience caused me brief moments of heightened anxiety as I navigated my way back to making both screens visible, without revealing this anxiety to the audience either visually or vocally. 'Losing the audience' in the context of a *Zoom* performance took on an entirely different meaning. During the performance I varied my gaze, I would look at different people in my gallery view and I would speak to them as I would in a performance where we were all the in the same room. Whenever I wanted to speak directly to the whole audience and to emphasise something I wanted them to consider, I looked straight into the computer camera. For example, when I said the following lines, I wanted each of the spectators to feel I was speaking directly to them:

what is your process ... are you faithful to it or do you fight against your process? ... The process is something like your destiny ... what is the quality of your submission to your own destiny ... and I am asking you too. (see Appendix Eight, Section 19: ix)

I used their responses to monitor and adjust my performance. More broadly speaking, I understand that by constantly observing, monitoring and adjusting my interactions with the audience I can shape my experience of the performance. Indeed, I can influence the potential for a transformation of self and/or of an encounter between audience and performer. My

awareness as the performer is steadily co-created 'in conversation' with the audience. This dialogue contributes to the possible arising of encounter and transformation. I do not feel I am exploiting the audience for my own benefit; neither am I performing to them 'in order' to effect an encounter. Rather, as Whalley and Miller suggest there is something that occurs 'between' performer and audience 'that allows for the development of an affective response to performative material' (2017: 61)

Salata writes that during the period of Art as Vehicle, Grotowski's research question involved the role of the witness's reception of the performances. Salata explains that

reception is possible via sympathetic resonance with the processes of the performers. [Grotowski] calls this kind of reception 'induction', borrowing the term from physics [...] By relying on a scientific term rather than the vocabulary of esoteric practices, Grotowski tries to objectify the vivid spontaneous organic response to the work that offers neither a plot, nor narrative, nor clear meaning. (2012: unpaginated)

As Esslin suggests 'the only authentic experience that can be communicated is the experience of the single moment in the fullness of its emotional intensity, its existential totality' (2001: 91). This is what I hoped to achieve: to communicate my inner experience to the witnesses of my performance and for them to experience it, completely.

The inner experience may or may not be received or shared by the audience, there is always the possibility of a gap between intention and reception, making autobiographical work, as Heddon aptly observes, 'possible performances of possibility' (2008: 2). Grotowski suggests however, that normally in theatre the performance of a text in its totality - the montage - occurs 'not on the stage, but in the perception of the *spectator*' (1995: 124 italics in the original), whereas in Art as Vehicle 'the seat of the montage is in the *doers*, in the artists who do' (Grotowski, 1995: 122). In other words, in the case of Art as Vehicle, the performer is sharing with the spectators their inner work, their inner process, their inner life. No

agreement or definition of the inner process of the performer is needed between the spectators, '*only the impact on the doer is the result*' (Grotowski, 1995: 124, my emphasis). Grotowski's intention is that step by step the performer 'approaches the essential' (Grotowski, 1995: 125). For Grotowski, what is essential is the movement the performer is able to make energetically from an everyday level to a higher connection. Grotowski considers that when this is achieved, the possibility of an encounter is created.

## 5.7 Encounter?

Reflecting on my performance, a number of questions emerge that seem critical at this stage of the research

- Did the thesis performance achieve an encounter between performer and audience?
- Did I share with the spectators my inner process and inner life?
- Did I experience an encounter with the audience as the performer?
- Is there any evidence to suggest that the audience, individually or as a group, experienced an encounter?
- Did I experience any sense of self-transformation or liberation from a constricting narrative?
- Did the performance have any other impact on me or my personal potential?
- Did the performance have any other impact on the audience?

From my own point of view, both performances (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021) exceeded any expectations I held.

I certainly experienced extended moments that are consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's criterion of 'flow' (2002: 75): for long periods I was focused and completely absorbed, without feeling any attachment to a particular goal, outcome or result. Indeed, Erhard points out that to be detached (or more accurately non-attached) '*to the content of one's perception or the content of one's experiences*' gives rise to a transcendent experience of accepting *what is*

(Erhard and Fadiman, 1977: unpaginated, my emphasis). In a similar fashion, Grotowski writes that '[t]he actor's first duty is to grasp the fact that nobody here wants *to give* him anything; instead, they plan to *take* a lot from him, to take away that to which he is usually very attached' (2002 [1968]: 262 italics in the original). In hindsight, by watching the recording of the two performances, remembering, reconnecting and reflecting deeply on the experience of performing, I have no doubt that there were several prolonged stretches of not feeling attached and feeling clear and present, able to let everything, including myself, just be, in each and every moment. Much of the text, and in particular the songs were performed 'off the top of my head', entirely in the 'here-and-now'. This experience of flow and unattachment was only punctuated by brief intervals in which I lost my sense of agency or control, which were fleeting and easily restored as soon as both sides of my computer screen were visible again.

In this performance I drew deeply on and expressed through story some of my innermost challenges including the trauma of abandonment, sense of isolation and desire to belong. In retrospect, I can state that that by commemorating and honouring these challenges intimately, through story and song, in dialogue with the audience, more than in any previous performance, I felt freed from their restrictive influence. This allowed me to deepen and integrate my discovery of myself as an artist and as Performer. I refer to this experience, inwardly, as a sense of 'coming home'. I believe this is very slightly different from the type of event which Buber calls an encounter, which is beyond experience and is a grace. Describing encounter, he argues that

if I have both the will and grace [...] in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it [...] everything is 'indivisibly [...] united in this event [...] it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it - only in a different way [...] I encounter [...] the tree itself. (Buber, 1958 [1937]: 7-8)



This performance did not occur to me as this kind of event. It was indeed profound and meaningful, it was transformational and liberating; while I was performing I felt 'in the moment' and present, I sensed almost throughout that I was 'reaching' the audience, but I did not feel 'indivisibly united'. In this sense it was perhaps a complete 'theatre encounter', but not a moment of theophany.

I am aware that in this performance, perhaps more so than any of the previous performances discussed in this thesis, something special and different was occurring. As a way of being and performing, I was not relying on what Grotowski refers to as a 'bag of tricks' (2002 [1968]: 16), I had 'disarmed myself' (Grotowski, 1995: 120). Grotowski distinguishes being disarmed as no longer needing the approval of others (2001: 215-216). Richards refines this further by suggesting that the performer is able to affirm themselves (1997: 29). Throughout *Nothing* I believe I affirmed:

- **The me who is living the life** - the child, the boy, the adolescent, the young man, the adult and the mature senior.
- **The me who envisaged the performance** - who pictured someone on stage telling the story of the life of the man.
- **The me who wrote down the story of the life lived** - the author of the performance text.
- **The me who devised the performance** - the one who rehearsed and practiced, the practitioner.
- **The me who has had that life and who looks back on it** - Thomas Richards calls this *inner and outer ripened*. The one who knows that there is still something to accomplish as his task in life (Richards, 2008: 51).
- **The me on stage making the performance** - the doer, the performer.
- **The character** - the *not me / not not me*

However, despite being distinct aspects of my self, they felt and occurred to me *as one*.

Drawing on thinking by both esotericist, P.D. Ouspensky, and the spiritual teacher Georges Ivanovic Gurdjieff, in relation to Grotowski's approach to theatre, Catherine Christof refers to this state of oneness, wherein all these aspects of oneself are brought together, as

‘the greater self’ (2019: 164). Richards describes this greater self as a particular state of being which he believed could be seen in ‘*certain older persons* as an extremely special fullness of presence quite difficult to articulate in words but which nevertheless you perceive’ (2008: 51, my emphasis). My sense of self, my self perception, my experience of myself during *Nothing* was that the sum total of my lived-life experience, including performing, spoke through me. For extended moments during this performance, I was able to communicate something essential. By essential, here I do not mean something inner, core or eternal, that makes me who I am. Rather I succeeded in communicating what author Ian McEwan describes as ‘a glimpse of what we might be, of our best selves, and of an impossible world in which you give everything you have to others but lose nothing of yourself’ (2005: 171).

I cannot ever ‘know’ the experience of another. However, reflecting on the remarks and feedback offered by the audience after the two performances there is a suggestion that some people felt *they* had had an encounter with me, as I performed. One person literally said, ‘I experienced an *I-Thou* in your performance’. Another shared that ‘words were insufficient to capture [his] experience of the performance which transcended language, in expression, tone, intonation, body language and intention’. This was echoed by others, who reflected that they had been touched or moved or inspired; each person sharing how they had connected to an aspect of the performance that was most resonant for them personally. In particular, one member of the audience described her experience of the performance as ‘lots of content and no content’, indicating to me that I had successfully followed the recommendation offered in the scratch iteration to ‘shuffle’ the themes and make the performance more abstract, nonlinear and musical. A number of people concurred with a person’s feedback that the performance had ‘created an intimate community of strangers’,

confirming my intention, as I stated above, to create the sense of us all being in one room and connected to each other. Still others commented that the piece was thought provoking, and pointed to the 'dense layers' of the performance and how they would go away and "continue to ponder".

## 5.7 Conclusion

For many reasons, including the need to perform online, *Nothing: An Experiment in Encounter* was a different kind of show than I had undertaken previously. Rather than focussing on past adventures, it was predominantly a story of now. I mined my very current feelings and sensibilities to craft a performance which could be both of-the-moment and in-the-moment. What emerges from its analysis is the centrality when devising a show that is potentially transformational and may give rise to an encounter with the audience, of the following five facets of performance. They are:

- story and narrative
- time and place
- self, identity and persona
- authenticity and presence
- artistic, theatrical and dramaturgical choices

These of course are often the central characteristics of performances. What is decisive in the transformative process is what the performer 'does' with these components. By 'does' I mean how the performer approaches the devising and making of the performance, with what intention and in pursuit of what outcome. What does the performer intend to realise? What do they wish to bring about or accomplish? What do they hope to become aware of,

appreciate, and acknowledge? How do these facets of performance recombine to produce new personal insights that can be acted on and incorporated into life? What stories are re-authored?

The process of devising and performing *Nothing* has suggested that these five components are not discrete and independent rather they are interconnected, consistently overlapping and merging, and are [re]iterative and co-dependent, each arising together with and alongside the others within a performance.

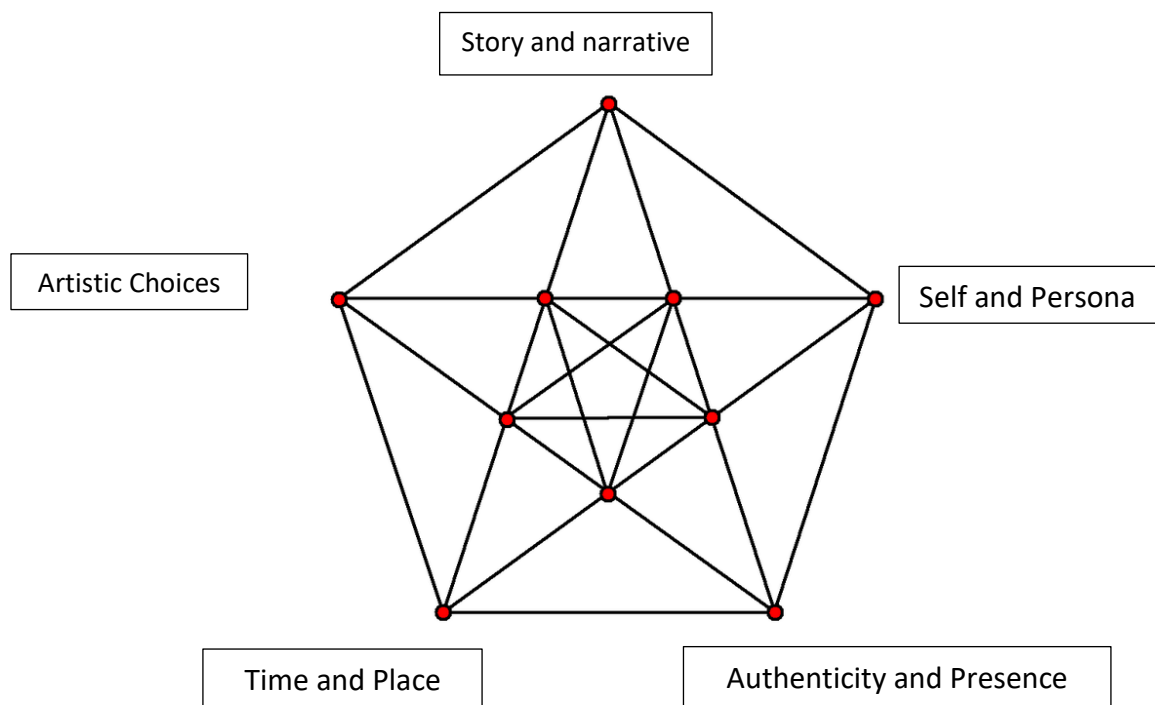


Figure 16. A diagram illustrating the inter-connectedness of the five facets of Solo auto/biographical theatre in my practice

The performance demonstrated how story and narrative are intrinsic to auto/biographical performance and the “story-ing” of our lives can help us to reshape the direction of our lives’ (Rouverol, 2005:23). In *Nothing*, I exemplified how the narratives of place I inherited from previous generations, the social and political discourse of the times in which I matured and developed, the cultural conversations inherent in growing up in a

Jewish, Zionist-Socialist family, as well as the stories of my own experiences that I tell myself and repeat to others about myself, all intersect and intertwine, influence and shape my being and my becoming; they are intricately woven and are not inseparable. Places, even those I have never known personally, give rise to certain stories which in turn influence my sense of who I am. This influences my choices. These choices shape the subsequent stories I tell. They are constantly having a direct impact on my sense of identity and what I consider possible for my future. Narrative and story are the basic frame for solo auto/biographical theatre, and it is the exploration of the stories that contains the seeds of transformation.

The performance illustrated how the artistic, theatrical and dramaturgical choices I made to depict these stories nurtured new narratives of possibility. In particular I actively demonstrated how the exploration and the experience of 'noth-ing' is directly aligned to Grotowski's technique of *via negativa*. It is this aspect of *Nothing: An Experiment in Encounter* that is one of the major ways the thesis performance aligns with the written thesis. Performing more consistently at the level of 'beyond technique' allowed me to inhabit the persona Mo that I have been developing since the performance in Israel far more fully. Indeed, the audience did not even question 'who was on stage'. In character, I was able to employ my persona to provide the audience an authentic (by which I mean, truthful) glimpse into my life and my inner world. Since Israel in 2018, I have gradually constructed / cultivated a very precise *not me* but *not not me* on-stage persona who is Mo Cohen artist and Performer. In *Nothing*, I (the Mo people in the audience recognise and know) am clearly visible. As Auslander suggests, I am not hiding, I am not a fictional character (2015: 76); the persona (*not Mo* and yet *not not Mo*) was as close as I could possibly make him to the actual Mo.

My performance also revealed for me a discovery about encounter that plays an important part in my development as a solo auto/biographical performer. For Buber, the encounter is an entirely subjective and personal phenomenon. It cannot be planned, forced or contrived. It is also not an experience. It is an 'event' that occurs beyond both inner and outer experience. It is a grace, which arises in relation to the Other. It arises when I, and I alone, am '*I-Thou*', rather than 'I-It'. In this moment of being *I-Thou*, the Other is no longer Other; as Buber states 'I do not experience the man to whom I say *Thou*. But I take my stand in relation to him in the sanctity of the primary word' (Buber, 1958 [1937]: 9, italics in the original). The event is holy.

In contrast, in my practice shared, mutual, co-creation is pivotal to the transformational experience. The arising of self-transformation occurs in, with and through the witnessing of others. Self-transformation is a different 'level' of encounter. This does not preclude the possibility of a moment of grace and an encounter with the audience. It does however indicate that there are alternative kinds of encounter, one of which manifests as self-transformation - that is, the 'letting go' of a restrictive or inhibiting story.

Finally, I can state with certitude that the inclusion of song and singing in these performances has proven to be core to my own experience of transformation and of finding myself and allowing me to be found by others. Rather than searching for a good voice, I have discovered an authentic voice, a voice that is my own. This accords, with Guignon's perspective, as I noted earlier, of finding parts of yourself that have been lost, displaced or forgotten (Guignon, 2004: 2), and with Spry's observation that auto/biographical performance offers her 'the power to reclaim and rename' her voice (in Heddon, 2008: 3). The performance clearly indicated that transformation is not just a numinous, spiritual, ineffable phenomenon but can be tangible and have expression in one's being-in-the-world

and in everyday living and lived experience. In my case, this is a transformation of my artistic potential, my musical potential, my self image, self confidence and self esteem, and my level of authenticity - both owning myself as my possibilities, and in the more contemporary sense of being and acting in such a way that is in harmony with, and a reflection of who I hold myself out to others to be. In other words, I am able to be as I tell others I am.

## CONCLUSION

### 6.0

The concept of self-transformation describes both an individual process that the performer undertakes and a personal outcome they achieve. The process towards self-transformation consists of specific inquiries into self, identity and memory, employing creative and self-reflective techniques designed to bring about new perspectives on old concerns. It is inevitably a process that involves returning: returning to the past, returning to stories and narratives. For some people it may include returning to certain places or individuals, and eventually returning to self. As I wrote in the introduction, metaphorically returning in self-transformation is more like climbing a spiral staircase in an old lighthouse with narrow windows, than taking a step backwards. Each time the person ascending the stairs passes a window they have the opportunity to look down at the same terrain, each time from a new and unfamiliar angle. As Thich Nhat Hanh aptly states, the path of return continues the journey<sup>67</sup>.

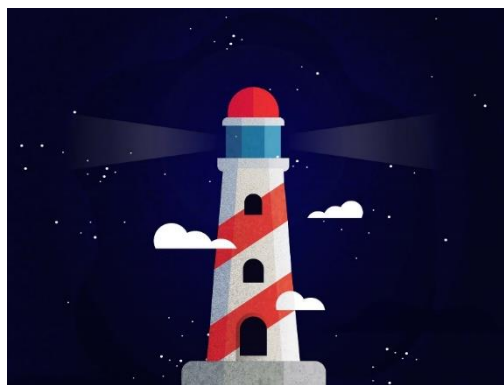


Figure 17. Illustration showing a lighthouse with an internal spiral staircase.

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<sup>67</sup> The Path of Return Continues the Journey is a play by Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh originally written in 1972 and republished in 1993 by Parallax Books. It appears currently to be out of print and I was unavailable to either obtain or view a copy.



This process of exploring old ground from new angles is intended to lead to a moment, or moments, of insight that can be accepted, appreciated and integrated to become instances of transformation, defined here as 'escape' from the 'grip' of a story. Grip means both believing its truth is absolute and immutable, and experiencing its impact as limiting on one's personal potential; escape means eliminating. Transformation is also the context of the creative process and is entered into willingly and consciously by the performer. It is within this transformational context that my PaR project set out to produce new knowledge about a form variously called Autoperformance (Kirby, 1979: 2), Autoethnodrama (Saldaña, 2011: 24) or Autobiographical Performance (Heddon, 2008: 2) and that I refer to as solo auto/biographical theatre.

Heddon expresses a desire and a need to believe that auto/biographical performance can be transformational, that it is more than just a potential (2008: 3). This project validates and substantiates the proposition that solo auto/biographical performances can consistently be transformational. Further, my research indicates that this potential can be actualised on a reproducible basis. The research process has identified a number of key components of devising performances that have catalysed the transformative process and/or the transformational moment and that I believe can make a similar experience accessible, available and repeatable for others; these will be discussed in detail below.

To illuminate these new insights, in this thesis (both written and performance elements) I describe a personal journey of theatre practice, in which I both return to the past - in order to unconceal possibilities that have been neglected or spurned, or were undervalued at the time - and simultaneously strive towards a new more liberated future, in which I live in and from a category of being I refer to in the introduction as transformed. This is, the state of being in the world wherein I am free from the constraints that the narratives I

have inherited from others have imposed on me, and from the limitations I have placed on myself via my own stories that I have invented in response to my circumstances of living. Grotowski expresses his awareness of these constrictions, and the liberatory potential of theatre, when he states that

We are bound, consciously or unconsciously, to be influenced by the traditions, science and art, even by the superstitions and presentiments peculiar to the civilisation which has moulded us, just as we breathe the air of the particular continent which has given us life. All this influences our undertaking. (2002 [1968]: 24)

Drawing on Heidegger's terms, I am seeking a way of being in which I am no longer living from either my 'thrownness' (1962: 174) nor in response to 'The They' (1962: 213); rather, I am 'owning' or taking responsibility for my life and making it mine. To accomplish this freedom, and to better fulfil my potential I employ and engage in solo auto/biographical theatre, over an extended period of time, returning to the past to become increasingly aware of my 'thrownness'.

Thus, the thesis describes the arc of my personal transformation, through PaR, from non-actor to adept Performer and from entrepreneur to artist. In Chapter One, I laid out the grounding influences that informed the development of my practice and my performances: the work and research of Werner Erhard into personal freedom, self-transformation and the nature of being, and the approaches of theatre maker and researcher Jerzy Grotowski, his thinking about the liberatory potential of performance and the revealing of the total human being with all their 'past and future history' (Grotowski, in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 224). In Chapter Two I reviewed the work of other solo practitioners and their application of story and narrative in performance. I describe my own practice and early performances as an untrained, unskilled performer. The chapter revealed how personal stories of place and time,

family narratives and social discourse all combine to play a part in shaping self-perception, and one's responses and personal beliefs about the world they inhabit and interact. It also illustrated how approaching auto/biography from different theatrical methodological standpoints can result in the surfacing of different memories or different categories of memory, which have the potentiality of delivering new insights or understandings and can lead to the re-authoring of old narratives.

In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I chronicled the process by which I have drawn and built on the knowledge of the theorists and researchers discussed in the literature review, the expertise of the two interlocutors, Erhard and Grotowski, and the methods and techniques of the practitioners Ken Campbell, Lisa Kron, Spalding Gray and Deb Margolin. Throughout these chapters I analyse and explain the development of my skills and technique and how I incorporated this foundational material into my practice.

In Chapter Three, I interrogated the roles that time and place, audience and encounter, play in the process of self-transformation. In particular I pay attention to the concept of return. Returning and returns are central to the successful accomplishment of self-transformation through solo auto/biographical theatre. Returning to specific places, as I did to Machanayim or as Pearson did to his home village of Hibaldstow where 'significant things, memorable events, happened to me' (Pearson 2014: 210), allows for 'corrections and contradictions' of the story to occur and for new realisations to permit and assist in an alteration of course into the future. Returning to old memories and/or old stories carried forward from previous times, seen again through newer and different lenses, provides the opportunity for re-examining old assumptions (that may masquerade as truths), reframing meaning, and shifting outlook or perspective. Pearson describes how, despite having a prepared text, during his performance in Hibaldstow, he 'could barely get a word in' and was

‘constantly interrupted by others with additions to, and corrections and contradictions of my story’. As he aptly states

there are always those who remember us, remember for us, better than we do ourselves; and as soon as I stop talking others began, with other memories of these same places at other times, for this was the landscape of their childhoods too, many of them. Performance here is mnemonic; becomes dialogic and celebratory (2014: 211)

In Chapter Three I described how my performance at the *Machon* Reunion was equally dialogic, celebratory and liberating.

Whalley and Miller assert that ‘[t]here are things we understand that we don’t enjoy, and things we don’t understand that can transport us’ (2017: 126). In Chapter Three I explained how in the Jewish tradition, it is the performer’s return to self, the act of Teshuvah, that is the fundamental ground of being for encounter. Buber says

There is an experience which grows in the soul out of the soul itself, without contact and without restraint, in naked oneness. It comes into being and completes itself beyond the commotion, free of the other, inaccessible to the other. It needs no nourishment, and no poison can touch it. The soul which stands in it stands in itself, has itself, experiences itself - boundlessly. It experiences itself as a unity (1996 [1909]: 2).

I understand this to be the core of being *I-Thou*, an ontological phenomenon that is beyond everyday understanding and yet contains the potential for transporting and transforming experience.

Throughout the project I believed that the pivotal point in the research was the performance in Israel. This was the moment when I abandoned the theatrical forms of *Moses*, *Morris*, *Harry & me* and *State of the Union - My Year With Donald Trump* and began committedly performing auto/biographical monologues, rather than them just being poorer, unprepared substitutes determined by (festival) circumstances. Chapter Four describes this process of transition and explores my growing understanding of how to transfer theatre skills

and technique to monologic performance. I emphasize the concept of 'beyond technique' - in particular the components of persona, presence and authenticity - how these shape or impact the process of self-transformation, how they each relate to the story the performer tells and how they influence the potential for encounter between performer and audience.

In Chapter Five, I compare and contrast my thesis performance with the work of contemporary theatre maker and performance artist Selina Thompson and demonstrate how each of our concerns and the themes of our story telling are similar and rooted in a shared experience of separateness, diaspora and a longing for home. I integrate all the above into a detailed examination of self-transformation, particularly through the process of devising the thesis performance.

## 6.1 The Thesis Performance

The written thesis and the thesis performance constitute one body of knowledge.<sup>68</sup> They tell the same story from different perspectives. Taken together, both are integral to my practice, to the research and to my development as an artist; they form a unity. Both contribute to the arc of the argument that solo auto/biographical theatre can indeed be a transformational process. The thesis performance allowed me to include and share aspects of the research process that I had wanted to claim but were being excluded from the written thesis. In many instances, these were relevant to my everyday practices of living, and to my off-stage future. These dimensions of the research related to Jewish life, Jewish spirituality, Jewish ethics (in particular, social justice or *Tikkun Olam*), God, oneness, transcendence, the

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<sup>68</sup> The link to the private YouTube channel where the two evenings of the thesis performance can be viewed is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2lhNQy-qYI>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbn5o3x-bCo> – It may also be found at the beginning of the script in Appendix Eight.

future of the Zionist project and the future of the State of Israel, my personal relationship with Israel, my levels of satisfaction about living in the UK, and my relationship with my sister. Neither the length nor scope of the written thesis allowed for their inclusion.

The thesis performance was therefore my opportunity to accomplish three goals. First, to ‘thicken’ the ideas and philosophies analysed in the written thesis into a rich story with a clear arc (Geertz, 1973: 6). Second, it was the space to include some of the thinking and writing that I had been unable to incorporate into the written thesis; and third, it was also the opportunity on stage

- **To embody** - that ‘I am not my story’
- **To be** - that ‘my identity is a construct’
- **To perform** - that ‘I belong, and we all belong’,
- **To become** - ‘that I am always enough’

I am not purporting to be either a guru or spiritually enlightened, however I also wanted to experiment with the idea that performing a solo auto/biographical theatre monologue could be a ‘transmission’ to an audience of witnesses in a similar way that a spiritual guru transmits their teachings to the community: mind to mind, heart to heart and soul to soul. Additionally, it was an opportunity to experiment with the potential of *Zoom* as an expressive channel of performance despite being distanced or remote. This performance was not supplemental to the written thesis; they parallel each other.

*Nothing - An Experiment in Encounter* completes the arc and progression from the first performances, in 2016 and 2017, and demonstrates how my practice has developed. While I recognise that I have presented the performances as being separate and distinct, they can also be understood as one single, long, extended, auto/biographical-developmental-process

that mirrors my own 'journey' of self-transformation from novice to Performer, each step contributing to my becoming an artist.

## **6.2 Contribution to Knowledge - 'Beyond Technique'**

The primary research question in the introduction to this thesis concerned how the process of devising, rehearsing, and performing solo auto/biographical theatre can occur as a transformative experience for the performer. Now, at the end of the inquiry I recognise that this question could have two distinct meanings: how is it experienced by the performer and/or how does it happen as a process?

Identifying and articulating how the transformative experience happens, how it is accomplished, how it may be recognised, and the elements of which it consists, is my substantial contribution to knowledge. Principally, it concerns the phenomenon that I have been calling 'beyond technique'. This is not another technique nor is it simply a concept; rather, it is an important component of practice, which I am calling a *technê*. For Heidegger *technê* is a way of knowing that 'belongs to bringing-forth [...] to poiesis; it is something poetic' (1993a: 318). It is, he writes, 'where aletheia, truth, happens' (1993a: 319). In my practice, this *technê* called 'beyond technique' embraces and brings together all the previously acquired skills of performing into a unified whole. It is simultaneously a revealing of oneself and a way of knowing oneself as being whole and complete. The performer experiences themselves in a condition of oneness or unity, that is in a state of integrity. The emergence of this *technê*, in this practice, pivots around the co-emergence of presence and authenticity. I wrote about this in detail in Chapter Four in regard to my performance of *Work in Progress*. At that time, a moment occurred in which I believe that I achieved a state of

'beyond technique'. It was a spontaneous arising of 'face-to-face' intimacy. Without presupposition, anticipation or expectation. It was outside the realm of concept. It was not a phenomenon that we ordinarily refer to as an 'experience'; it had a far more ineffable quality and was more akin to a subtle shift in consciousness. Indeed, Buber repeats three times in close succession: 'I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou' (1958 [1937]: 9), and '[w]hat then, do we experience of Thou? Just nothing. For we do not experience it' (1958 [1937]: 11). Performing at the level of 'beyond technique' implies that the performer is in a heightened state of awareness in which their body/mind takes over; they are 'in flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 5); there is no conscious effort to accomplish anything. There is no attempt to 'meet' the audience or to achieve an encounter and yet this may occur.

'Beyond technique' is not the encounter but it is the technê that can 'open the door' to encounter. Moreover, 'beyond technique is not self-transformation' but is the technê that provides the springboard to the experience of being transformed. My own experience, as a performer, is that, in the rare moments that I am in this state, I feel truly alive and connected to the material, to myself and to others. In the performance I feel that the material - the text, the songs - are alive and have a life of their own. I sense that the audience also experiences me as making the performance come alive, and an encounter with the audience may occur. Buber proposes that this is always a 'grace' and cannot be forced (1958 [1937]: 11).

In my personal recollections, the 'beyond technique' moment is often brief but within the brevity it has momentum. It is moving; an energy moves within me and between me and the audience. This movement has the potential, but not the guarantee, for others to share in the moment, and to be moved. For example, hinting at a moment of transformation, playwright and performer Robbie McCauley describes this energy as



‘creating a kind of groundwork for dialogue’ in which the audience may respond by saying ‘You made me think; I disagreed with you, but I was moved to think’. [...] When I say movement, I mean going from something blocked and unclear to something open and clearer so that we can move to change things. (in Patraka, 1996: 215)

For Thomas Richards, this movement indicates that inner centres of energy are being activated, and a vitality/life force is released in the performer which flows up toward more subtle energies (1995: 19). Any attempt to manoeuvre, control, manipulate this process almost certainly implies its disappearance.

The audience recognises ‘beyond technique’ in what Patrice Pavis calls a ‘je ne sais quoi’ experience which triggers a feeling of identification, and communicates both a sense of ‘living elsewhere and in an eternal present’ (in Goodall, 2008: 1). Reflecting Pavis’s observation, one member of the audience who witnessed my thesis performance, and visibly struggled to articulate their precise experience, said falteringly

I found myself floating around for the first part of the presentation ... [until] ... I connected in a deeper way when you started to share yourself at that level [...] I was very moved by that kind of sharing ... and also inspired to continue to live what’s possible.

At the level of, and in the state of, ‘beyond technique’, presence and authenticity are not necessarily ‘visible’ or distinguishable per se to the audience; however, they are ‘visible as transparent’ as they are embodied and integral to the be-ing of the performer. In their feedback, most people who witnessed the thesis performance did not specifically refer to ‘authenticity’ or ‘presence’. I believe, however, that it is precisely because these theatrical qualities existed ‘transparently’, that they were distinguished instead, via the text, as lyrical, poetic or prayerful. Grotowski states

We know that the text per se is not theatre, that it becomes theatre only through the actors' use of it - that is to say, thanks to intonations, to the association of sounds, to the musicality of the language. (2002 [1968]: 21)

Hinting at this transparency, one person compared her experience of my performance with her previous experience of viewing an abstract, colour-field painting by the artist Mark Rothko as ‘ultimate and empty’.

Like Spalding Gray and Ken Campbell’s work, a performance that results from ‘beyond technique’ might in some cases look impromptu or ‘off the top of the head’, leaving the audience with the impression they are seeing the performer’s authentic or ‘real’ self. I believe I achieved this in *Work-in-Progress* at *Drop the Story Festival* in Devon in 2018 and in my *Zoom* thesis performance. In the thesis performance the audience’s awareness that there were shows on two consecutive evenings and therefore obviously had a predetermined script did not detract from their experience of ‘no gap’ between Mo the character, Mo the performer, Mo who they all knew exists off-stage, and the material being delivered. The performance was considered authentic. After the *Untitled* performance in Israel, as I discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the audience was confused about my onstage persona. I was not performing at the level of ‘beyond technique’. After the thesis performance, however, it is noticeable that the conversation with the audience, suggested no such confusion. There were no questions or comments regarding the relationship between myself, character or persona. The on-stage persona Mo was acknowledged, accepted and unopposed. This is illustrated in the feedback of one member of the audience who expressed her appreciation for the way she experienced the on-stage Mo

building on your thoughts, reflecting the personalities of those individuals from your past [...] becoming more and more yourself [...] unpeeling the onion, uncovering who you are, becoming more authentic.

### 6.3 The Spiral of Performance

Eugenio Barba writes that between themselves, he and Grotowski referred to two types of techniques, 'technique 1' and 'technique 2'. Technique 1 focused on 'vocal and physical possibilities', technique 2 aimed at releasing the spiritual energy contained in each person (1999: 55). He adds, that if he were to 'define Grotowski's attitude throughout his entire active life [...]' he would choose the Sanskrit term *Sâdhanâ* which simultaneously means spiritual quest, method and practise (1999: 55). Correspondingly, based on the PaR journey described in this thesis, I propose that the state of 'beyond technique' may be achieved by engaging with what I call 'the spiral of performance'. This spiral is rooted in practice and consists of three re-iterative components, or loops.

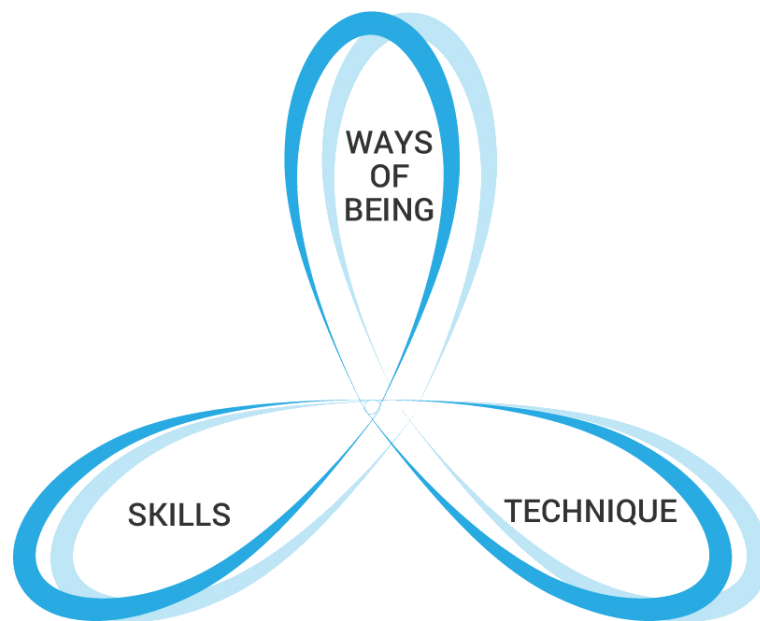


Figure 18. Showing the iterative nature of the interaction between the three loops of the spiral of performance.

- **Loop 1 - Skills:** including, but not limited to, breath, physical and vocal skills. Breath control is fundamental in affect affecting the range, volume, and speed of both speaking and singing. Physical skills include proprioception, movement, posture, gesture. Vocal skills include tone, volume, speed, accent. In loop 1, over time, the

performer hones their skill. They gradually progress from being untrained and unskilled to gaining rudimentary skills and having a basic grasp of the skills required to become 'Performer' (Grotowski, 2001: 376). From a rudimentary level the performer moves on to being competent, that is, having an adequate grasp - and then to proficient, being accomplished and experienced. With ongoing practice, the performer reaches a level of mastery or expert skill. At this level they are well versed and in command of their abilities. This can lead in turn to a higher level of virtuosity, and exceptional skill.

- **Loop 2 - Technique:** Grotowski refers to this process of development as 'verticality' and calls these energies 'the forces of life'. These include the inborn vital currents, impulses, and autonomous forces that are innate to the body. The lowest levels are everyday, coarser, heavy energies and the 'density of the body'. The performer strives to reach to 'a level of energy more subtle or even towards the higher connection' (Grotowski, in Richards, 1995: 125), passing through the energies of authenticity and presence to a state of connection. Verticality is the 'passage' the performer takes towards a higher, more subtle energetic connection. Throughout his career Grotowski employed established methodologies that raise an individual's spiritual energy. These included breath-work and vibratory singing, psycho-physical movement, silence, replacing fear with faith, letting go of control and spending time in nature. Grotowski describes the performer at the lowest level of the loop as '[d]ilettante', needing approval and applause operating from coarser everyday energies, such as anxiety, approval and concern. These are gradually subtracted, cleared out and replaced by more connected, subtler 'spiritual' energies (such as coherence, authenticity, presence and connection), which become increasingly integrated, incarnate and

personified. As the performer develops their technique, they become less armoured, clearer and more transparent. Russian theatre director Anatoly Vassiliev explains transparency as a psychic phenomenon in which the actor is

entirely open, a channel for the divine [...] the actor starts to gather forces that are linked to that spirit, at that moment theatre changes its essence. (in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 19)

By 'changes its essence' Vassiliev means the theatre becomes non-narrative; '[a]t that moment, he concluded, what we are faced with is something entirely different - something almost unknown in the modern world' (in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 19).

This description captures concisely my ambition and aspiration for solo auto/biographical theatre to be a theatre that is not bound by the 'thrownness' of its performer.

- **Loop 3 - Ways of Being:** These are rooted in self awareness and include but are not limited to, worry and concern, enthusiasm, trust, humility, confidence and courage, commitment, investment and intentionality, sense of connection, acuity and awareness and empathy. All these influence how the performer manages their emotions, beliefs and perceptions how they interact with others, and overcome any challenges they meet.

My personal endeavour to achieve this ambition has involved ascending these rungs. When I came onstage in my earlier performances - *1966* (2016) and *State of the Union: My Year with Donald Trump* (2017), described in Chapter Two - it was as an untrained performer, 'just being me', at the level of the lowest rung. I was unskilled, dispersed, needing to please the audience and gain their approval. In Grotowski's terms, I was a *dilettante* where 'one has no capacities' (in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 295). During this period, I was drawing on what Amankulor

calls ' clichés and banalities that destroy the art' (in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 360). Indeed, even my luck in mounting a successful performance of *Moses, Morris, Harry & me* (2011) fits precisely with Grotowski's description that

[t]he dilettante may make something beautiful, more or less superficially, through this excitation of the nerves in the first improvisation. But it is to sculpt in smoke. It always disappears. The dilettante searches "sideways". (in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 302)

Like Walter Benjamin (see Chapter 3.1), Grotowski also refers to the metaphor of digging. For Grotowski going sideways means always to remain at the surface, 'not like digging a well' (in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 302). Indeed, between 2011 and 2016 the work I made went 'sideways' and never recaptured the success of *Moses, Morris, Harry & me*. It took six years of 'inner' searching, metaphorically digging 'down' not moving 'sideways', learning skill and technique development, and (to revert to my own metaphor) of 'climbing the ladder' to finally come on stage, in the thesis performance, and be 'just me' as 'Performer'. The latter, for Grotowski 'is a question of *be-ing*' (Grotowski, in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 377 italics in the original), being true to 'my destiny' (Grotowski, in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 377). In my reflective journal after the thesis performance, I described this to myself as 'knowing myself as the clearing'.

In order to achieve 'beyond technique', the actor approaches, studies and rehearses each lower level to develop and hone their skills, to transcend what each skill level is designed to achieve, and to climb to the next level. At the level of 'beyond technique' the skills (outer - visible) and techniques (inner - invisible) of all the other levels are fully integrated and embodied. This artistry-of-practice looks to the audience like spontaneity. It is the amalgam of everything that has come before, reconfigured in a form that has never emerged previously. This level of 'beyond technique' is an occurrence that exists in the performer's

being and is manifested in each action the performer takes. In my practice, technique at the level of 'beyond technique' implies being in a 'space of possibilities' (Schatzki, 1989: 85), open to all the possibilities that arise as a result of merging, harmonising and galvanising the interlocking practices, human qualities and ways of being that are inherently involved in the creative act. These include openness, transparency, spontaneity, courage, investment, surrender, submission, authenticity and presence.

As I stated in the introduction, one intention of my practice is to perform to an audience or a community that knows the performer; that is, people who are involved with their life, who know and understand their 'personal process' (by which I mean their evolvment or becoming, their emotional growth and development, the advancement of their self awareness and self understanding) and who can appreciate intimately the transformations that have occurred by undertaking the journey of devising and mounting a solo auto/biographical performance. I have no doubt that since my thesis performance, the audience, who previously may not have considered me to be either an artist or *Performer* (in Grotowski's sense of the term), may now have a different experience/perception of me and know or think about me in a more expanded way. This phenomenon is important because the circulation of a new story bolsters, invigorates and grants being to the person in the new version of themselves. By 'granting being' I mean someone's unconditional willingness to accept another exactly as they are.

Janet Gyatso points out that in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition '[s]elf-transformation is further objectified when it is articulated by its subject in the form of autobiographical accounts' (2002: 187). By objectified, I understand her to mean that self-transformation is confirmed, accepted and endorsed by others, and she

postulates 'that without an audience, self-transformation does not take place'. This too is central to my practice of solo auto/biographical theatre - first, 'beyond technique' is learned, systematically, over an extended period of time; the qualities named above become practised and embodied; a new auto/biographical story emerges and is performed and witnessed. Finally, the self-transformation is confirmed by others. The new story now has the possibility - the chance or opportunity - of circulating within the community, and the performer can become known by/as their new 'transformed' account of themselves.

#### **6.4 How Self-transformation is experienced by the performer**

My research leads to the understanding that self-transformation is experienced, by the performer, as a series of new realisations or insights that arise spontaneously as a result of the self exploration and self dialogue that takes place throughout the process. Heidegger describes the process that leads to insight as 'a leap' (1968: 8), which Hyde and Kopp clarify as 'the thinking of the unthought, and ultimately the unthinkable' (2019: 284). By unthinkable, they mean that within a particular epistemology something cannot be apprehended, suggesting therefore that an insight indicates and/or is accompanied by a shift into a different level or sphere of knowing or understanding. This shift is precipitated by establishing an appropriate context.

Context is decisive in organising meaning. Jerome Bruner suggests that meanings vary by context, and he writes

Meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know 'what they are about.' Although meanings are 'in the mind,' they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they are created. (1996: 3)



Moreover, Erhard emphasises that

Context is the freedom to be. Context is space. It has no form, no place in time, it allows form in time. In the absence of a consciously created context, our lives are controlled by the content - the forces and circumstances of the condition in which we live. Once you create a context, that context then generate a process in which the content - the forces and circumstances - reorder and align themselves with the context. (1980: unpaginated)

Context in this research project refers to the overriding or primary frame within which the individual undertakes the process devising a performance. Contexts are constituted in language, and it is context that fundamentally influences or shapes the understandings and interpretations of this particular creative process. In this practice context is not solely art, theatre, or making theatrical performance, nor indeed auto/biographical performance. Nor is it the specific places for the performances, or the specific audiences. These all have an important bearing and play a meaningful part in the devising process and in the ultimate presentation of the work to an audience. However, without negating or diminishing the value of any other form of solo or auto/biographical performance (such as stand-up comedy or verbatim theatre), establishing that self-transformation is the context for making this particular kind of work is central to this practice.

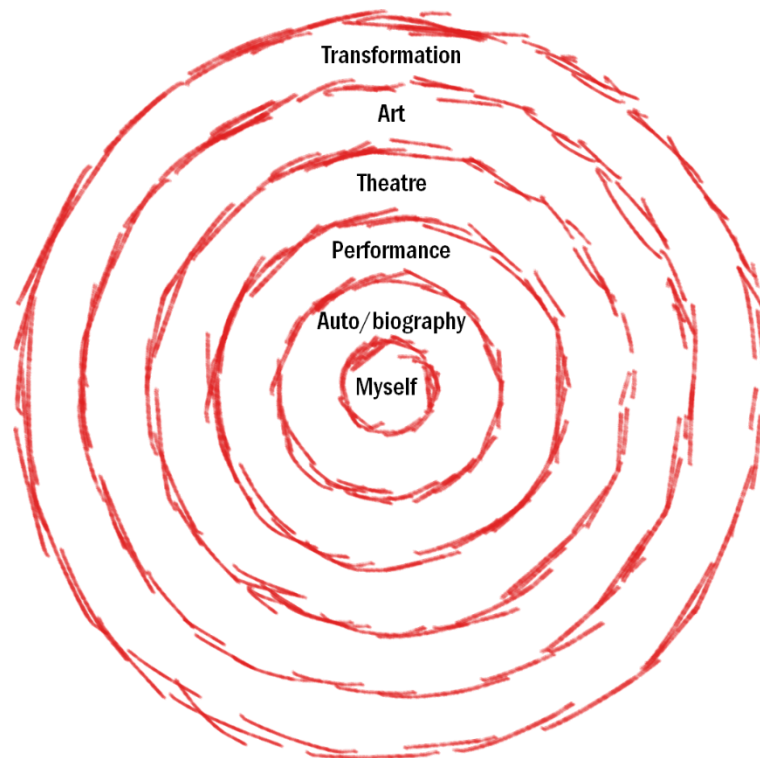


Figure 19. Illustration showing transformation as the primary context for insights.

Insights can occur at any point: during writing, at rehearsals, in the performance itself, or after a performance on reflection. Insights are not solutions, answers or explanations. My own insights happened at all these different times. They involve a combination of ability and willingness to modify one's conclusions about oneself and/or others, and a sudden alteration of a belief, idea or perception. Heidegger calls the outcome of 'the leap' the '*Augenblick*', the moment that something is called forth, a moment of vision (1962: 376). Insight is a moment of new thinking and knowing, an instant of redefinition. Philosopher and performer Stuart Grant describes the *Augenblick* as 'the moment where the performer stands poised on the cusp of possibility' (2015: 217). Possibility here is not used in its everyday understanding of opportunity or likelihood, rather it means the performer stands on the cusp of a new way of being, if they choose to make it their own. Grant describes it as 'the flash of the moment of the coming forth, the almost imperceptible, unencompassable, and inexperienceable

inceptive occurrence [...] *the unfolding of being*' (2015: 216-217, my emphasis). An insight can challenge one's personal status quo, it can introduce a new and fresh perspective on existing circumstances; it can offer a new way of viewing or thinking about oneself; it can shift the way one views the world and one's personal life-rules about being in and/or responding to the world. An insight can catalyse re-examination of long held assumptions or supposed truths. Insights could include disruptive observations about one's behaviour or the behaviour of others, or a discovery about the underlying motivations that drive one's own or other people's actions.

However, not all insights are transformational. While they may all have transformative potential, the transformational *Augenblick* happens when one gives oneself to it, by which I mean one chooses to embrace and accept it; Grotowski proposes that 'the actor opens and gives himself [...] and does not hold back before any obstacle set by custom and behaviour' (2002 [1968]: 124). Moments of insights become transformational events when they are accompanied by what we would call today a personal commitment or stand, what Heidegger terms 'resolution' (Heidegger, 1962: 394). Grant describes it as entering 'the moment of the coming-forth [...] to belong to the *Augenblick*, requires a letting oneself be taken over by the coming-forth of the moment in order to become what one is' (2015: 224). Grant notes that the performer 'belongs' to the *Augenblick* rather than the other way around, about which I wrote in detail in Chapter Four in reference to the experience of 'letting oneself be taken over', Barba's notion of 'not being dominated by technique' and Erhard's idea of being used by a context greater than oneself.

The research therefore proposes that

- the process of skill development and technique development leads to a state of being called, 'beyond technique',
- during the process the *Augenblick*/insight may occur,
- which, once integrated, can contribute to the transformational experience

However, the researcher is compelled next to ask 'How?' How does 'letting oneself be taken over' happen? How does the performer accomplish 'being used by a context greater than oneself?' Grotowski proposes that

All conscious systems in the field of acting ask the question: 'How can this be done?'. This is as it should be. A method is the consciousness of this 'how'. I believe that one must ask oneself this question once in one's life, but as soon one enters into the details it must no longer be asked for, at the very moment of formulating it, one begins to create stereotypes and cliches. One must then ask the question: "What must I not do?" (2002 [1968]: 207)

Grotowski's termed his method of 'not doing' *via negativa*, a rigorous process of eradication, elimination and subtraction.

## **6.5 *Via negativa***

*Via negativa* is central to my next contribution to knowledge about solo auto/biographical theatre. This finding creates a new potential for people making work for the purpose of self-transformation by proposing that the process of Solo Auto/biographical Theatre reverberates with Grotowski's method of *via negativa*. Grotowski regarded routine or everyday human personality as beset by emotional constrictions, psychological taboos and inadequate cognitive frameworks which block rather than permit full self expression and human potential. As I noted in Chapter Two, his technique of *via negativa* - improvement by

subtraction - involves the gradual stripping away and elimination of these blocks. Grotowski describes *via negativa* as a 'state of mind' that 'awakens' the actor and eventually leads to what he calls their disappearance 'into the acting craft' (2002 [1968]: 17). This idea of disappearance into craft correlates closely with my proposition that a performer who reaches 'beyond technique' achieves a state of being in which they transformatively experience themselves as whole and complete, unfettered by narrative or story. Both *via negativa* and 'beyond technique' involve 'letting go' of technique and echo the notion of Noth-ing, as an experience of oneness and wholeness, as I expressed in the thesis performance (Appendix Eight, Section 2: iv).

Within the solo auto/biographical practice that I have developed and written about in this thesis; I have pursued a *via negativa* across the five facets of performance identified in Chapter Five:

- i. story and narrative
- ii. time and place
- iii. self, identity and persona
- iv. authenticity and presence
- v. artistic, theatrical and dramaturgical choices.

While the explanation that follows is linear and sequential, in practice the pursuit of *via negativa* was more holistic and interconnected.

Throughout the research project and especially during the process of devising the thesis performance, I worked to disarm myself and be vulnerable. As I have shown in Chapters Three, Four and Five, and indeed in the thesis performance, throughout this practice the performer slowly uncovers their 'story' to reveal their potential self, and to more fully own (be responsible for) their possibilities. This uncovering occurs as a consequence of what

Grotowski calls 'work on self', specifically in order to make art. 'Working on oneself' implies discovering and removing the emotional associations that hinder full self-expression (Grotowski, 2002: 34), and being able to connect to the audience. As I described in Chapter One, in the *est* training and in the leadership programmes following *est*, Werner Erhard also emphasised that the possibility of human being was to live with no inhibitions; this included overcoming fear, expressing vulnerability, and the willingness to show emotion without reservation.

My practice has not attempted to replicate Grotowski's exercises or activities for disarming the actor; rather, it has drawn from and adapted the underlying principles and philosophy of *via negativa* to meet the needs of a maker and performer of solo auto/biographical performances. Specifically, I have developed my physical and vocal skills and technique - from rung to rung - through rehearsal, learning and practising improvisation, through scene work, movement and voice work, and consistently developing and making solo auto/biographical performances. When I look back over my body of work, it is apparent that I have stretched my abilities and technique beyond my 'comfort zone' in order to 'climb the ladder of technique' at every phase of the research. I have questioned and challenged my beliefs through structured and semi structured conversations, reflective writing, requesting and taking instruction, feedback and guidance, and through exploring persona in the devising stage. I have sought out and confronted any emotional blocks or barriers to my performance, to my potential and my possibilities for the future. In particular, I have ceased to be 'dilettante' about performance and have become far more intentional in practice, preparation and performing. I consider this quite distinctly as technique development. As Grotowski states

one cannot be a non-dilettante - have competence in such work - if one has the spirit of a tourist. By the spirit of a tourist, I mean that one replaces one proposition by another one without really accomplishing any of them. In this

field, *one of the tests is a kind of individual ethnodrama*. (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 302, my emphasis)

From the outset of the research, I have been striving to develop and understand my own 'kind of individual ethnodrama', that I call solo auto/biographical theatre. Grotowski states that ethnodrama is a difficult thing to achieve because 'you pass through crises' (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 302). Creating ethnodrama involves specifically focusing on 'association exercises' returning to associations, images, moods, and emotional tones in order to 'express something personal about yourself' (in Schechner and Wolford, 2001: 497).

In my practice, I have emphasised and paid particular attention to 'association exercises' to (using Grotowski's metaphor) 'dig down', and revisit the more challenging or painful experiences in my life. Indeed, this has often necessitated passing through associated crises and traumatic experiences. The development of my solo auto/biographical performances has inevitably required a profound re-examination and re-appraisal of my understandings and interpretations of those events. These association exercises of Grotowski's share precisely Erhard's intention in the *est* training of facing down old and unprofitable patterns of thinking and acting, which I discussed in detail in Chapter One. As Moreno aptly expresses it, this has meant 'experiencing them out' (Moreno, 2014: 245), thereby establishing a pathway to 'beyond technique' and self-transformation. How the audience would 'see' this is discussed below.

In Chapter One I referred to Grotowski's assertion that

we arm ourselves in order to hide, honesty begins where we are vulnerable. Honesty is not possible if we hide, we hide behind clothes, ideas, characters, staging tricks, intellectual concepts, gymnastics, yelling, chaos. If the method makes any sense, it is precisely as a way of disarmament, not technique. (in Rusek, 2012: unpaginated)

The most visible facet of my own *via negativa* begins especially where I have allowed myself to be vulnerable. As a result of engaging deeply with association exercises, I have experienced the entire eradication of the story I have called 'I'm not musical'. This is a literal 'message' I received at school at age eleven and I naively incorporated into my body, my beliefs and self image. It was an imposed and unrequested story, and I have carried it with me and performed it precisely, for over fifty years. Less visibly, at around the same time, also at school, I was also told I was not artistic. While I have always known that I engage with activities in my life artistically, I have not considered myself to be 'an artist'. Allowing myself to consider myself as an artist, with an on-stage persona (who can express my possibilities), has freed the range of dramaturgical choices I can make. Regarding the story 'I'm not musical' my first choice was to consciously express my vulnerability by singing in public, then increasingly to make singing more central to the performances, to commit to singing lessons, and finally to engage my vocal coach as the artistic director of the thesis performance. This process has without doubt contributed to a self-transformation, whereby 'the grip' of the story has been eliminated; I have rediscovered my voice and reclaimed an important personal freedom.

I consider the field trip to Israel to be an extended association exercise. It also proved to be a pivotal period of research regarding the artistic choices I made thereafter, about the stories and narratives I wished to tell, and how I wished to tell them.<sup>69</sup> It also involves another instance of *via negativa*. As I wrote in Chapter Three, I had begun at that time to ask myself questions about personal spirituality and artistic integrity and it was my intention to explore possible new perspectives on old family narratives through this lens of inquiry. I trusted that the outcome of performing these new perspectives would be releasing. The transgenerational

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<sup>69</sup> I have become less concerned about revisiting and sharing anecdotes from my past and more interested in exploring (Jewish) spirituality.



narratives that I inherited from my parents, grandparents and great grandparents about being Jewish, Zionist-Socialist, and the significance of being one of the first Israelis, came under intense scrutiny, and the *Augenblick* moment of realisation - that the (Kibbutz) Machanayim I remembered from the 1970s no longer existed other than in my memory - eradicated the grip that that place had exerted on me for the previous three decades of my life. In that moment and since, both the inherited narratives and my personal story about my relationship with Israel has transformed from an imposition to a choice. I have discovered far more personal agency in deciding and defining where I stand in relationship to Israel, as the place of my birth, as an idea and a project and as a contemporary political entity. By agency here I mean the ability to recognise and locate myself in a new level of consciousness - that circumstances are only correlated to my experience but not causal - that I am not 'a victim of circumstances'.

In this sense, my level of consciousness is associated directly with my experience of personal freedom and choice. bell hooks, writing in a different context and from her own perspective and experience, states '[m]arginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation [...] it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance' (1990: 341). I have been able to relocate myself to this site of radical possibility. Exploring my identity both off stage in Israel, and on stage in the performance, resulted in a shift in perspective and created more distance between my emotional connection to Israel and the reality of the situation. As I wrote in Chapter Three, just as in Healey's play *Drawer Boy*, there was a breach in history and a destabilising of identity which allowed for the emergence of a renewed and self-authored individuality.

In summary, my path along a *via negativa* and my ascent of the ladder of technique, has been: through work on myself and choosing to allow my vulnerability to be visible; by

deep inquiry into my memories and recollections; by using association exercises and exploring transgenerational narratives; by creating autoethnodramas that are designed to uncover previously unrecognised sources of my identity; by developing my theatre skills and cultivating my performance technique; and finally by choosing consciously to locate myself in a context of self-transformation. These approaches are available to others who choose to engage with solo auto/biographical theatre as a transformative process.

## 6.6 Self-Transformation and Encounter

As discussed in Chapter Two, for both Erhard and Grotowski, transformation is not a change in circumstances but an inner shift in one's relationship to and experience of those circumstances. In my own experience, this transformational or ontological shift is accompanied by an expanded sense of possibility and potential. Indeed, the recognition that the circumstances surrounding events of my life are not as fixed or solid as I originally thought can broaden to impact other stories I hold as real, true or inescapable. I find that this realisation can ultimately be extended into an awareness or consciousness that *what is, simply is*. The more fully I embrace this consciousness, the more I am able (in Heidegger's term) to 'be-with', or (in Buber's terminology) 'to meet' another being, without any 'story' attached to the experience. That is, I approach the other person from a position of no judgement, opinion or evaluation of them. Nothing stands in the way between me and them. This is potentially a moment of encounter.

Encounter, as it is described by Martin Buber, is dialogic; it occurs in relationship. Indeed, my experience of my thesis performance was of a dialogue with the audience, and their feedback suggests strongly that this experience was reciprocal. One person said explicitly 'the experience I experienced was *I-Thou*'. Another shared that they 'read' in the

performance something indescribable, that transcended language, 'that was really moving [...] I was really moved [...] I felt I knew you better'. A third person offered that every time she heard the word 'I' in the performance she heard the 'I' 'that is connected to everyone and everything, in the past, the present and possibly in the future'.

Self-transformation is one way to create the conditions for encounter. Like transformation, encounter is a phenomenon of be-ing. However, for Buber, encounter is also theophonic, a moment wherein the divine appears and 'God appears' in relationship, in the between. My own felt sense is that both transformation and encounter are 'ultimate experiences'. Each stands alone in its own sphere; they cannot be compared. For Erhard, transformation is the 'centre' of the phenomenon of being. For Heidegger, possibility - the clearing or openness - are descriptions of the centre of Dasein. For Buber, encounter is the centre of religious experience. However, each is ineffable, each lives in the domain of the mysterious and is beyond language. In a 1967 interview, Grotowski states that '[t]he core of the theatre is an encounter' (2002 [1968]: 56) that is made possible by disarmament. Grotowski describes the encounter as crossing

[t]he frontiers between you and me: to come forward to meet you, so that we do not get lost in the crowd - or among words, or in declarations, or among the beautifully precise thoughts [...] to touch you, to feel your touch, to look at you, to get rid of fear and shame into which your eyes drive me when I am accessible to them, whole. Not to hide, to be as I am. For a few minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes, an hour, at least. To find a place where a communion becomes possible. (Grotowski and Taborski, 1973: 133-134)

The word communion finds its roots in the notion of 'shared by all'. This is the ambition of my practice. However, being, transformation and encounter are fleeting; they are events that happen outside of time, and as Grotowski hints above are bound by time. Being retreats, transformation fades, The *I-Thou* of encounter returns to the I-it. Nonetheless,

transformation and *I-Thou* are both aspects of being that, in their potentiality, can reach out to other spheres of living, and in both there is an opportunity of breakthrough to a wider horizon of living.

I have thus far concluded that -

- i. 'beyond technique' is central to self-transformation
- ii. *Via negativa* is a valuable method highly akin to beyond technique' and appropriate for inclusion in Solo auto/biographical theatre
- iii. disarming and expressing vulnerability are key aspects of both beyond technique and *via negativa*
- iv. inquiry into place and time are important elements in the process of self-transformation
- v. self-transformation, 'beyond technique and *via negativa* are possible pathways to encounter.

It is important next to ask how the audience - fundamental to encounter - can know that self-transformation has taken place. How is transformation recognisable in the performance? And it is here, again, that Grotowski provides the understanding that is most applicable to solo auto/biographical theatre. Wolford explains

Grotowski posited that performing arts can be viewed as a chain with many links. At one extreme, he placed the normal artistic theatre, the theatre of productions, oriented toward Art as Presentation; at the other end of the chain, he situated Art as vehicle. Grotowski articulated one of the differences between Art as Presentation and Art as vehicle in relation to the respective places of montage. "In performance," he clarified, "the seat of the montage is in the perception of the spectator; in Art as vehicle, the seat of the montage is in the doers, in the artists who do" (in Schechner and Wolford, 2002: 368)

In many cases, the spectators may not 'know' the self-transformation has occurred. In my approach, it is possible for the performer to include speaking about their transformation

explicitly during their performance. It is also possible that it can be raised and discussed in the post-show conversation with the audience. In *Nothing*, the self-transformation 'sat' entirely with me, the doer; I knew. Others who know me well, and witnessed the performance, may have been able to detect that I was no longer grappling with the same old issues or concerns about Israel or myself. Indeed, Israel scarcely featured in the monologue. However, what the audience feedback conveyed, very strongly, was their new experience of me: in Grotowski's words (above), being vulnerable, not hiding myself, not playing tricks, and, in contrast to the performances *1966* and *My Year With Donald Trump*, not being chaotic. In hindsight, perhaps there were still too many 'intellectual concepts', which might account for some spectators reporting they felt lost at the beginning of the performance. However, part of the research and experiment of *Nothing - An Experiment in Encounter* was to test the potency of Margolin's approach to text, playing with philosophy, 'concept, language and meaning' (Alker, 2008: 118).

Of growing interest to me and, therefore within my practice, has been the part of the mystic stream of Judaism, Lurianic Kabbalah, which describes the origins of creation, and contains the concept of *Tzimtzum*, a withdrawal (Schwartz, 2004: 42). I made brief reference to my own connection to this tradition in the thesis performance (Appendix Eight, Section 10: vi). In the Lurianic epistemology, withdrawal makes the space for nothing, in which an act of creativity can occur. In the context of solo auto/biographical theatre as a transformative process, self withdraws, identity withdraws, the 'I' withdraws, leaving only the space of creation. During the period of Theatre of Sources, about which I wrote in Chapters One and Four, Grotowski describes this same act of withdrawal as the performer finding their 'inner silence', a particular kind of silence within words, sounds or movement. This is the 'movement which is repose' and is 'perhaps the crucial point where different techniques of sources begin'

(in Schechner and Welford, 2001: 263). Grotowski's *via negativa* is a prime example of *Tzimtzum*, wherein the actor withdraws and disappears, and the role or character who remains on stage is simultaneously visibly active and invisibly silent and still, synchronously absent and/but present, authentically available to meet the spectator (Grotowski, 2002: 130). I consider the achievement of *via negativa*, and this dynamic of withdrawal, as the potent merging of the inner and outer work, skills and technique, 'which manifests itself in revealing and coming forth, towards an other, for an other, and to find oneself in an other' (Salata, 2013: 180). In Grotowski's approach, this dynamic between inner and outer is not an 'as if it were happening for the first time' phenomenon; rather, a truly creative act implies actually doing it now, in the present moment. By forging this direct connection between 'beyond technique' and *via negativa*, I reintroduce Grotowski to auto/biographical performance and contribute to its articulation and vocabulary.

## **6.7 Audiences for this thesis**

I am aware that throughout this conclusion I have slowly been distinguishing who might potentially be interested in this thesis not only as an academic study but also as a way of actively engaging with their own process of self transformation. I have argued that the thesis offers

1. A new way of understanding the relationship between auto/biographical performances and their self-transformational potential
2. That It is simultaneously a way of knowing oneself as being whole and complete and of revealing this to others, live and in public, through performance

3. I have also suggested that whoever commits to engaging in this process can conceivably experience themselves in a condition of oneness or unity, that is in a state of integrity.
4. Moreover, I have postulated that the process of Solo Auto/biographical Theatre can give rise to personal insights that can challenge one's personal status quo, that it can provide access to new and fresh perspectives on existing circumstances; that insights can offer new ways of viewing or thinking about oneself or shift the way one views the world and one's personal life-rules about being in the world.

Additionally, the thesis introduces the thinking of Werner Erhard, and reintroduces Grotowski, into the field of auto/biographical performance, which historically is committed to personal, social, cultural and political change. While other autobiographical theatre makers explicitly link personal change to the social, cultural and political, this has not been my purpose for this research. Therefore, I am suggesting that the approach I am advancing here - which incorporates the approaches of these two interlocutors and offers a set of practices, (especially *via negativa*), that creates the possibility (opportunity) to discover the freedom to become the author of one's story and to view it from outside one's familiar and habitual identity - could be valuable or attractive to a diverse range of people with a variety of interests and concerns.

Groups of people who might find this transformational approach profitable include, but may not be limited to:

- Theatre makers - performers and actors of auto/biographical material, their directors and dramaturgs
- Psychotherapists, counsellors and coaches working with others to make changes in their lives

- People wishing to transform their life and escape the grip of unwanted narratives; to use Heddon's term, people who are committed to bring a new self into being, or simply wish to 'talk out, talk back, talk other' (2008: 3).

The unique combination of the theatre practices of *via negativa*, working in collaboration with a director, dialoguing with the audience, unmasking oneself in a live public performance to one's intimate community, and potentially accomplishing the technê of *beyond technique*, allows the performer to simultaneously explore and develop two distinctive versions of their lived experience - the limiting, *thrown* story, and its counter-story of possibility and potential. By learning to evacuate one's *thrown* self, and permitting the character or persona on stage to express their agency, choices and freedom, the performer may access a doorway to self-transformation.

This amalgamation of theatre practices, with the highly specific emphasis of *working on oneself*, allows this process to create a step that extends beyond other approaches to *talking therapies* which principally focus on the treatment of psychological disorders, restoring mental health, resolving problems or conflicts and improving relationships. Even the innovative approaches taken in Narrative Therapy, which has most recently been exploring the application of theatre to therapy, still positions the therapist as the performer and the client as the spectator (Carlson and Epston 2017b: 19 - 38).

Furthermore, by locating my practice in a context Auto/biographical Performance and of making art, learning to see and think like an artist - wherein you learn to view the circumstances of your life as the raw material that you can reconfigure into a work of art - is distinct from the primary aims and objectives of therapy, counselling and coaching. The very act of finally performing alone onstage to an audience, removes the authority and influence of the therapist (or the director) and fully returns personal agency to the



performer. By agency here I mean that sense of owning one's life and future, of stepping into one's possibilities in life and recognising oneself as the singular source of one's actions in the world.

Like Grotowski, I am not attempting to create a new method or system; I do not believe there is a fixed formula to draw on. The process of devising an auto/biographical performance is not necessarily ordered and will most likely vary for each individual undertaking such a personal journey, each with their personal purpose and aspiration. As I stated in the literature review, Heddon defines autobiographical performance as a broad term encompassing a wide range of different activities and approaches, and Smith and Watson describe the many practices of self representation that have been used by artists in the past.

I have suggested that including Grotowski's practices of *via negativa* – improvement through subtraction – in the process devising of solo auto/biographical performances, is a potential way to self transformation. This is by no means, formulaic. However, it may be methodical (precise, deliberate, systematic). It is a holistic / iterative process here that draws on and amalgamates autobiographical research and life history, narrative inquiry and autoethnography, and weaves theatre, performance and performance art into the transformational form I am calling solo auto/biographical theatre.

*Via negativa* removes bad habits and thereby promotes awareness and skills development; it erases emotional 'blocks' and consequently bolsters 'connection'; it ousts stale or redundant ways of being and replaces them with fresh, vital and clear alternatives. It creates the space for the performer to author new stories and new possibilities for their life.

Any 'identity' that is still being lived is always unfinished and in process. The story of that particular life continues. The feminist writer and activist Rebecca Solnit suggests that old stories can 'saddle us, ride us, whip us onward, tell us what to do, and we do it without

questioning' (2014: 4). These old stories may often have little or nothing to do with what once transpired and even less to do with what ever is happening in the present. However, they trick us into keeping alive old resentments, regrets or grudges that could otherwise fade away through the telling and retelling of new narratives.

However, in contrast, the thesis has argued that Solo Auto/biographical Theatre is a process that has the distinct possibility of discovering that one can live a life of choice, untethered by thrownness, and outside the invisibly imposed constraints of inherited story lines. Through *via negativa* one develops the personal capacity to render untrue any totalizing or finalizing definition of oneself. Developing this quality of *outsideness* - being outside one's thrownness - locates the performer as author, and frees them to create new possibilities, particularly the possibility of surprising oneself with the acceptance and adoption of new discoveries and insights. By *surprisingness* I mean the unforeseen willingness to live life as the transformed self and the newly self-authored story. This is the possibility offered to the performer in solo auto/biographical theatre.

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## APPENDIX ONE: FORMAT FOR STATE OF THE UNION - MY YEAR WITH DONALD TRUMP<sup>70</sup>

(PEP - PLYMOUTH, UK, 2017)

*Stage instructions ... notes to self*

- *Let the audience take their seats ... do not rush*
- *Come from nothing*
- *'Cast a net' over the audience*
- *'Shine a light' from my hara*
- *Intend a space of possibility*
- *Be fully self expressed*
- *Be free*
  
- *When everyone is settled ... hold a silence ... then*
- *Begin by formally handing the instruments - drum and drumstick, rain stick, bell - to the audience ... in silence*
- *Continue by laying out the bamboo poles on the floor ... creating a corridor ... the bridge*
- *As you construct the bridge whistle 'All the world's a bridge - a very narrow bridge ...'*
- *Once the bridge is laid out on the floor cross the bridge chanting 'All the world's a bridge - a very narrow bridge ...'*
- *Once you reach the far end of the bridge bow ritually and hold a silence*
  
- *Pick up the pack of cards and turn to the audience ... request the instruments*
  
- *Bang the drum and sing strongly 'All the world's a bridge - a very narrow bridge ... but the main thing to recall is to have no fear at all'*
- *Cross the bridge and return bow ritually and hold a long silence with back to the audience*
  
- *Turn to the audience and say*

i. *My mum died about 10 weeks ago... 8 ... 9 ... it doesn't really matter*

*Couple of years before she died, she told me ... when my sister who is 8 years younger than me ... and was two years old... The doctors... the consultants... said to her and my father "Mr and Mrs Cohen your daughter is spastic ... Put her in a home and go home ... have another baby and forget about her... Get on with your lives ...*

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<sup>70</sup> The format reproduced here represents, in as close a fashion as possible, the 'feel' of the original notes I used during the performance. It attempts to reproduce the energy, flow, rhythms and pulse of the performance. It may therefore be perceived by the reader as raw, unedited or un-proof-read. This is a deliberate strategy that attempts to provide the reader with a sense of the original rendition.

- *Cross the bridge ... reflectively ... using hands and fingers to indicate an inner process of thinking and say*

*I tend to discover who I am by approaching the past... To see who it is I have become today ... how is it is I turned out this way ... I tend to look to the past in order discover the source ... I was about 8 or 9 ... when that happened ... when my sister was born ... 10 ... 11 ... doesn't really matter ... when this declaration was made ...*

- *Hold a silence ... let the enormity of this event sink in*

*Ask the audience*

*What do I remember? I remember I was about 11 or 12 ... it doesn't really matter ... going to visit my sister in the hospital ... I think it might have been Great Ormond Street ... I don't really remember ... but it doesn't really matter ... I remember a corridor, a covered gangway.*

- *Indicate the corridor on the floor*

*Between two blocks ... it was outside ... I know it was outside because there were bushes and trees ...*

- *Take two strides forward and say*

*I think they were trying to straighten my sisters legs*

- *Using legs and trunk of my body twist my feet inward and bend my knees ... indicate to the audience how Ruth stands*

*But I don't remember where we had breakfast!*

*Step backward to indicate searching in the past*

*I remember they came in a taxi every morning to take her to school... But I don't remember where her bedroom was ... I remember getting the wishbone and wishing I could fix her ... that's the source and all the rest is compensation ...*

- *Take out the pack of cards from back pocket and scatter randomly across the bridge... Indicating the discarding of old memories*
- *The bridge and hold a silence*

ii. *The silence of the peasant and the silence of the poet may not be the same thing ... this has been a noisy year ... more noisy than most... hollow ... and dark ... and lost ... noisy hollow dark and lost ... and I have felt bereft ... bereft and bewildered ... bereft and bewildered and fragile ...*

- *Take the rain stick back from the audience ... and turn it to make the sound of storm waves*

*Fragile like dawn fragile like breath on a frosty morning*

- *Return rain stick to the audience and stride purposefully across the bridge*
- *Turn to the audience and sing*

*I come and stand at every door  
But none can hear my silent tread  
I knock and yet remain unheard  
For I am dead for I am dead*

*I'm only seven though I died  
At Hiroshima long ago  
I'm seven now as I was then  
When children die they do not grow*

*And right now I am outraged... I am enraged  
I am afraid*

- *stride across the bridge*
- *turn a face the opposite direction*

*iii. I am outraged... I am enraged  
I am afraid  
I am outraged... I am enraged  
I am afraid*

- *striding angrily in both directions - chanting increasingly loudly*

*30 4 49*

*30 4 49*

*30 4 49*

*30 4 49*

*I am outraged*

*30 4 49*

*I am enraged*

*30 4 49*

*I am outraged*

*30 4 49*

*I am enraged*

- *take the bell from the audience and shake while continuing to chant*

*30 4 49*

*30 4 49*

*I am outraged*

*30 4 49*

*I am enraged*

*30 4 49*

*I am outraged*

*30 4 49*

*I am enraged*

- *shake the bell vehemently*
- *hold a short silence then say*

*And I am afraid*

*I am afraid for myself*

*And I am afraid for my children*

*And I am afraid for my grandchildren*

*I am afraid*

*I am afraid for my children*

*And my grandchildren*

*I am afraid*

*iv. I am a child of the 1940s*

*Born onto a backdrop of Dachau and Nagasaki*

*Auschwitz and Hiroshima*

*Dachau and Auschwitz*

*Hiroshima and Nagasaki*

*Hiro-dachau and Nagasaki*

*Daga-sima Aushwasaki*

*Nagasaki ... Hiroshima ... Aushwitz ... Dachau ... Nagasaki ... Hiroshima ... Auschwitz*

- *Continue dropping cards*
- *Take rain stick - turn it and say*

*I am a child of the flames .....*

- *Keep turning the rain stick to create a background noise*

*We are all children of the flames .....*

- *Keep turning the rain stick to create a background noise*

*We were children of the flames .....*

*We are all children of the flames .....*

*Our voices will rise .....*

*30 4 49*

*30 4 49*

- *Sing softly, gently*

*My hair was scorched by swirling flame*

*My eyes grew dim, my eyes grew blind*

*Death came and turned my bones to dust*

*And that was scattered by the wind*

*v. And I am afraid for you*

*22 7 62*

*And I am afraid for you*

*14 10 57*

*And I am afraid for you*

*7 11 87*

*And I am afraid for you*

*18 12 91*

*And I am afraid for you 60*

*And I am afraid for you 50*

*And I am afraid for you 30*

*And I am afraid for you*

*And I am afraid for you*

*And I am afraid for you*

*I am afraid*

*I AM afraid ...*

- *Cross the bridge*
- *Take the drum and the drumstick from the audience*
- *Beat the drum*
- *Crossing the bridge back and forth*

*vi. Yesterday, today, tomorrow*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow*

*Yesterday it was Russia and Cuba*

*Today it is Korea and Japan*

*Yesterday we lost 4 H-bombs*

*In the Mediterranean*

*It was a mistake*

*Ooops sorry*

*Tomorrow*

*We'll lose Japan and Guam and the other islands*

*Oops sorry that wasn't meant to happen*

*I didn't see that coming*

*Hey*

*Thousands yesterday*

*Marched through Alabama*

*Selma Alabama*

*Peacefully, silently protesting hatred*

*Today thousands marched through the streets of Charlottesville*

*Killing and screaming and celebrating hatred*

*Yesterday missiles on warships en route to Cuba on the high seas*

*Today missiles fly over our oceans and islands*

*Yesterday H bombs*

*Today ICBM nuclear missiles*

*Tomorrow we will do better*

*That's what we said yesterday*

- *Cross the bridge*
- *Return the drum to the audience*

vii. *Yesterday I had a dream*

*If I can't Ruth, I'll fix the world*

*Yesterday we all had a dream*

*We'll fix the world*

*Today the empty streets are dead to dreaming*

*And the new dreamers are under attack*

*And there is no-one to follow them*

*Any more*

*Is there?*

*I am a child of the 50s*

*Rationing and austerity*

*When playgrounds were bomb shelters in local parks*

*I am a child of the 1960s*

*Protest, flower power, free love,*

*Sergeant Pepper, Bob Dylan, Abbey Road*

*1961 Cuba, Woodstock, Vietnam, Che Guevara,*

- *Keep dropping cards*
- *Sing*

*I need no fruit, I need no rice*

*I need no sweets nor even bread*

*I ask for nothing for myself*

*For I am dead, for I am dead*

- *Although this is a poem ... deliver as prose ... slightly staccato*



- viii. *'On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1965, in the multi-coloured multi-minded, united-beautiful-terrible States-of-America, Norman Morrison set himself on fire outside the Pentagon. He was 31. He was a Quaker and his wife (seen weeping in the newsreels) and his three children survive him as best they can. He did it in Washington, where everyone could see, because people were being set on fire in the dark corners of Vietnam, where nobody could see. Their names, ages, beliefs and loves are not recorded. This is what Norman Morrison did - he poured petrol over himself. He burned, he suffered. He died. This is what he did in the white heart of Washington, where everyone could see. He simply burned away his clothes, his passport, his pink tinted skin. Put on a new skin of flame and became Vietnamese' (Adrian Mitchell 1969: unpaginated).*

➤ *Sing*

*All that I ask is that for peace  
You work today, you work today  
So that the children of this world  
May live and grow and laugh and play*

ix. *'From the place where we are right  
Flowers will never grow  
In the spring.  
The place where we are right is hard and trampled  
Like a courtyard  
But doubts and loves  
Dig up the world  
Like a mole, a plough  
And the whisper will be heard  
In this place  
Where the ruined house once stood (Yehudah Amichai, undated).*

➤ *Sing*

*I come and stand at every door*

*But none can hear my silent tread*

*I knock and yet remain unheard*

*For I am dead for I am dead*

➤ *strongly*

- x. *On November the 8<sup>th</sup> 2016 the same multi-coloured, multi-minded, beautiful-  
united-terrible States of America, decayed, confused, but quite deliberately,  
elected its first pure, white president - it took 52 years and one black president, for  
white supremacy, white stupidity white complicity, white silence, to drown,  
disappear, resurface and reappear not everyone is a white supremacist, but the  
voters felt it was acceptable to send a white supremacist to a now extremely White  
House.*

➤ *Kneel as if praying if the confessional*

- xi. *Okay, okay ...*

*So, the secret is out*

*As it always must*

*in the end*

*But we must only whisper it so far*

*Between ourselves*

*Intimately*

*In hushed voices*

*There is never smoke without fire*

*Behind the woman who dances*

*And the man who sings*

*The woman who climbs mountains*

*And the man who drinks*

*The addict to drugs*

*Or the addict to power*

*Behind the man in the gutter*

*And the woman in the tower*

*The woman on the high wire  
And the mind who stands behind  
The man in the doghouse  
And the man in the White House  
There is always another story  
Of shame of pain of loss and of grief  
There is always more than meets the eye  
There is always a hidden secret  
A private reason  
A voice a space, that is calling out for love*

*xii.      And who am I  
That stumbles in the dark  
Rumbles and shakes  
In a corner  
mumbles alone on the bridge  
I am the fixer  
I am the twister of stories  
The shaper of dreams  
I am a key on the chain  
That unlocks the pain  
I am the fixer  
Making holes in the wall  
The fixer of hope  
Not lost  
But not yet found*

*We all have our personal holocaust  
And all the rest is compensation  
It is all survival*

➤ *Stand up and declare, while crossing the bridge*

xiii.     *So,*

*This is it*

*I find no truth in my circumstances*

*They are compensation*

*Not the source*

*I find no comfort*

*In the search*

*It's the compensation*

*Not the source*

*I found no solace in the reasons*

*They are compensation*

*Not the source*

*I find no love in solutions*

*They are compensation*

*Not the source*

*No truth in here*

*No truth in now*

*No truth in life*

*All these are compensations*

*Not hope*

*Not time*

*Not guilt*

*Not suffering*

*Or pain*

*They are all compensation*

*This is it*

*This is it*

*It was always it*

*Is always it*

*Will always be it*

*Now is not all we think it is*

*Now is not the moment*

*Between past and future*

*It is an empty space*

*Out of the stream of time*

*Past and present and future*

*Arise from now*

*This is it*

*Nothing to fix*

*Nothing to compensate*

*Nothing to survive*

➤ *Leave whistling*

*All the world's a bridge*

## APPENDIX TWO: KIBBUTZ

Kibbutz (plural kibbutzim) in Hebrew originally means gathering or clustering and is the Hebrew word for a unique Israeli type of settlement - used here in the sense of a small community, village, or group of homes - and an associated mode of living.<sup>71</sup> The kibbutzim initially were agricultural villages based on egalitarian, socialist and communal principles and deeply rooted in traditional Jewish values of social responsibility; according to Near, 'every version of kibbutz ideology is utopian' (1992: 155). Many of the earliest kibbutzim were sited strategically along the country's borders and outlying areas and were considered to be part of the defence of the country. The emergence of the kibbutz movement was a response to a number of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century social phenomena - in particular, the rise of violent anti-Semitism and the popular expansion of socialism. The first kibbutz was founded in 1909, however, today very few kibbutzim remain in their socialist form.

Kibbutz was not only a political response. It was a new social structure. It aspired to be more than the socialist slogan - first proposed by political philosopher Karl Marx in his book *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) - 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. It was also a symbol, a spirit and a state of mind. It occupied a central place in the mythology of a nation and was held up as the epitome of a new and just Jewish society. The kibbutz movement and kibbutz members were committed to egalitarianism, gender equality, democratic decision making, community justice and national responsibility including living in peace alongside their Arab neighbours. It embodied the spirit of the pioneer at the time, reclaiming uncultivated territory, in the swamps of the North and the deserts of the South. The description of the Jewish pioneer is now disputed and under scrutiny, both by the Palestinian and the wider Arab nations and increasingly within the Jewish Israeli population itself. I write with great regret and remorse, that the reality, it appears, is that reclaiming these territories often involved at least forcible displacement and at worst extreme acts of violence against the Arab population.

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<sup>71</sup> While today it is far more controversial and disputed, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the occupants and residents of the new Jewish cities, towns and villages being established and built throughout Ottoman and later British Palestine were referred to as settlers, as they were considered pioneers (Hebrew - halutzim) settling wild and uncultivated land (Near 1992: 8)

**APPENDIX THREE: FORMAT FOR THE ISRAEL PERFORMANCE - UNTITLED WORK<sup>72</sup>**  
**(ACCO - ISRAEL - 2018)**

- *Props - Backpack with I-Thou, Grotowski Source Book, papers, card and toilet paper.*
- *Come on stage wearing backpack, empty onto table*
- *Intention - share authentically about parts of my life since the Machon through performance.*

i. *Good evening,*

*I could say I have no idea what is going to happen next... really... This piece has changed at least three times since I started writing it... and thinking about performing here... at the reunion...*

- *show small pile of cards...*

*first it was about 16 minutes... I performed this (point to cards) at university... This*

- *point to large pack of cards*

ii. *was about an hour... I told Brownstein... He said no way... we haven't allocated that kind of time... So, I edited it ... did a run through for Jane and my brother and sister-in-law and then I rewrote it*

- *show papers*

*Even today I was making changes so really... I've no idea what is going to happen*

- *hold a silence*

iii. *It's a monologue now... I can't say I really like monologue theatre... or at least not most of it... but here we are... and lo and behold it's a monologue... personally I prefer more characters and more movement... if you've seen my first piece Moses, Morris, Harry & me you'll understand what I mean, I play the biblical Moses - Moché - Moché is my true name - he appears, Morris was my great grandfather and Harry was my grandpa ... I play them, even Golda Meir appears ...*

*But tonight, it's just me and I have no idea what is going to happen ...*

iv. *just to let you know I was written off at 11 years old as not being artistic and not being musical so there is a real stretch for me*

- *sing*

*Heal a ho boys*

*Let her go boys*

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<sup>72</sup> The format of the performance reproduced here attempts to replicate, in as close a fashion as possible, the 'feel' of the original notes I made to prepare for the performance. It attempts to reproduce the energy, flow, rhythms, pauses and pulse of the performance. It may therefore be perceived by the reader as raw, unedited or un-proof-read. This is a deliberate strategy that attempts to provide the reader with a sense of the original rendition.

*Turn her head round  
Into the weather  
Heal a ho boys  
Let her go boys  
Sailing homeward to Mingulay*

*That's a song about homecoming ... this reunion is about homecoming too ... isn't it ... and belonging ... homecoming and belonging are important themes in my life*

➤ *switch vocal register approach the audience and say softly*

- v. *Or, I could say... welcome to this gathering of ghosts... It's true isn't it we're not the ones who are really here, are we? We are not actually here; there are the ghosts of a hundred 17 or 18- or 19-year-olds here, they're the ones who are really here, aren't they...?*

*What do they want?  
Why did they come?  
Why did you come?  
And you ... why did you come?  
And why did you come?*

*Are we getting what we wanted?*

➤ *Switch register again - more upbeat, less restrained, more energetic*

- vi. *Or, I could tell you that in April I went to the Barber in town, in Totnes, in Devon, where I live. My barber is Glaswegian... He talks with a thick Scottish accent... I've seen him three or four times a year for almost 25 years and mostly I have no idea what he says to me... He's probably one of the people I've seen most regularly in my life, and I can't understand him when he speaks... in April I said Joe... his name is Joe... can you cut my hair, so it stays long at the sides and the back like it was when I was a teenager... And short at the top and front like me as I am now, at 69 ... he looked at me as if I was crazy, so I explained about coming to the reunion... then he asked me if I had ever taken acid when I was 18 or 19... and I told him how many times I had gotten close to that on the Machon ... but how someone ... usually Shelley ... had interrupted ... So, he said when you perform tell them that acid takes 20 minutes to kick in and you just took acid 20 minutes ago and you have absolutely no idea what is going to happen ...*
- vii. *Here's something else I had no idea was going to happen ... the question I have been pursuing for the past year or so ... in ... my life ... is 'what kind of life would I have to lead for people to say about me ... he led a life of artistic and spiritual integrity' ...*

*This question became my question because something else happened that I had no idea was going to happen ...*



- viii. *You know how sometimes books in a bookstore just jump off the shelves and demand you read them ...*

*Actually, before I go there ... let me let me ask you if the name XX (name changed for anonymity) means anything to anybody...*

➤ *Take responses and explain to others*

- ix. *XX is or was a UK jeweller who inherited his father's business which was a national chain of jewellery shops ... and when he was asked on the radio in interview one time about the products in his stores he said 'they're crap' ... and the value of the shares in his business crashed on the stock market and the board threw him out... anyway here's the point XX was in my class at school and ... well, we had an initiation rite of passage... where we would go shoplifting... and steal books... Only he beat us all... and he stole a monopoly board... And when we got out of the store and he showed us the board we said - but where's the box, you know where's the top hat and the little dog ...?*

*So, here's the point, you know how sometimes books just jump off the shelf in a bookstore and dim and you read them, or buy them, or both... Or steal them if the ghost of DA is with you... Well about three years ago that's how it was for me... I was in London in Foyles... Foyles is a big book shop huge like a block in central London a block high and a block long and a block wide... where I live, in Totnes, we don't have huge book shops in fact we don't have huge any shops at all... I was looking for all the books I had seen online that I couldn't get in Devon... And I know you can buy books online... but I like the feel of books before I buy them... Anyway, I was buying books that I thought would be useful in my PhD... but I could not find any of them... But..... this one book ... this book...*

➤ *Show book*

*The Grotowski Sourcebook was screaming at me ...*

- x. *I had never heard of Grotowski ... I knew nothing about him... but it flew off the shelf... I flipped through it, and I loved it... It's a kind of anthology... papers he'd written... articles about him... about his work and his life and his approach to theatre and to performance and to writing scripts and making theatre plays how to encounter the audience... And the more I read the more I liked him... he felt like a kindred spirit... It felt like a kindred spirit had just walked into my life... I went into a bookshop found out I found a life... how does that happen I had no idea that was going to happen*

➤ *Pause and let people catch up*

*His first theatre was only 60 kilometres from Auschwitz ... He was concerned with politics... I am concerned with politics... In one of the first chapters he's called a Catholic Polish Hasid ... a Hasid ... I really liked him ... in the 1980s I had studied the stories of the Hasidim ... He says*

*of himself that he has come 'to make holes in the wall' ... I love that ... that describes how I feel about my life ... Someone else writes that he walked around with a book... this book ...*

➤ *Show audience*

*I-Thou ... he walked around with this book in his back pocket it was his favourite and most influential book, and Buber was his most influential thinker... In the 1980s I studied Martin Buber and his approach to Judaism... Another writer asks did he want to be the Werner Erhard of Eastern Europe... Werner is one of my most important teachers... if not my absolutely most important teacher ... in the 1970s Grotowski went cross country in the USA ... like Jane and I did ... and he might have met Carlos Castaneda ... in the 1980s I did my anthropology project for University on Castaneda ... by now I am falling in love with this guy even though I'd only just met him ... also in the 70s he took his theatre company out of the city and on to a remote farm where they cut wood and cooked on open fires and had activities in barns and walked in the forest sang and danced and climbed mountains ... all to create a free and authentic encounter between human beings ... and I went ... this sounds like summer camp in the movement ...*

*His concerns were my concerns ... his experiences echoed my experiences ... although we were a generation apart and from separate cultures, I felt like we'd travelled the same journey ... and he was dedicated to the liberation of the human soul!*

➤ *Pause so people can take a breath and catch up*

*And... one of his closest colleagues called him spiritual and artistic integrity Incarnate that he embodied spiritual and artistic integrity and that for the past three years has become my question, my quest, my inquiry, my journey, my process, my research into myself, my being and becoming what would it mean to lead a life of spiritual and artistic integrity - who would I have to be and become to live life, to live my life, like that ...*

- xi. Here's something else I did not know was going to happen... I stumbled into my PhD about four summers ago... I went down to Plymouth university to meet the head of the theatre department Professor Doctor Roberta Mock... Jewish... American... feminist... I mean what more could anyone want! Someone along the line had suggested I meet her... I only went for coffee... to network... to share what I was up to with solo theatre in Totnes and to hear what was happening at her end ... in the university and then see if something... anything emerged from the conversation ... pretty much nothing more than that... I went for a coffee and got a new life how did that happen! You just never know!*
- xii. About 20 minutes into telling her about our groups and our festival and my performances and directing she says well that would make a very interesting PhD... I logged it ... I went home... told Jane... she begged me not to take on another big commitment and that it wasn't the right time... so I left it ... 6 months later it was still with me, so I went back to Roberta... and I asked her what she meant... she explained... I asked her what it would take... she explained... And she told me how to register... I think that was September or October 2015 ... and by January 2016 I*

*was on the programme... it's 2018 now and I'm only beginning to realise what it takes ...*

- xiii. So, you may be asking yourselves why would I be networking about theatre in the first place... Well in 2012 I guess I put on the first Nearly Real Theatre Festival in Totnes ... a festival of solo autobiographical performances ... Shelley and David were there, they came over ... I organised the festival and directed some of the performers... and the festival became an annual thing in Totnes and ... and that is what Roberta found interesting ...*
- xiv. OK ... so you may be asking yourselves how come I'm running theatre festivals and solo groups in autobiography and workshops and directing and performing in the first place...*

*Actually, before I go there let me tell you a bit more about the first festival... That festival happened because I spoke to someone in Santa Fe who seemed to be doing something similar... we spoke on Skype, she was nice... a little bit too new agey for me... and at the end of the conversation I said who else should I be speaking to? She said 'Oh you must talk to Tracy in Toronto... so I did.*

*I Google her... found her... email to... and set up to speak to her by Skype... Man she was doing what I was doing for similar reasons successfully for years already... she was Jewish she had thought about becoming a rabbi... Somewhere in the last 50 years so had I but that is another story for another time... anyway Tracy told me she'd been invited to give a lecture in Ireland... Actually, it turned out to be Manchester England... remember?*

➤ *Sing*

*Manchester England, England... across the Atlantic sea...*

*So, I said if you're coming to Ireland come to Devon. We could create a festival... you could create a masterclass... she came and not only did she come but her mom came ... and four other performers... and we had a five-day international festival... How did that happen; you just never know what's going to happen; this was something else I did not know was going to happen ...*

- xv. But ... by now you may be wondering ... why was I contacting people around the world to talk about solo auto biographical theatre ... step back to 2011... in 2011 I performed I devised a piece of work together with a director ... Mark Drummond ... who I am still working with today, and we created a one man show... that's what I called it at the time... entitled Moses, Morris, Harry & me ... but why was I creating a show ... Good question ... something else that I did not know was going to happen ... In 2007 and 2008 I had been working, a lot, in the National Health Service ... and I'd been involved in some life and death conflict situations ... acting as a mediator ... Around that time in Autumn 2008 I went to the first European Narrative Therapy and Community Work Conference in Brighton... on the last day of the conference I attended an amazing workshop ... about the power of the narrative approach to*

*resolve conflict... It was about a stand off outside Toronto ... between members of First Nations tribes ... white residents of a Toronto suburb... the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the land developers ... who wanted to build on the reservation of the First Nation... and I made myself a note literally saying 'do a degree in conflict resolution' ...*

➤ *Pause*

- xvi. *One week later I was at a birthday party talking to an old friend from my days in Playback Theatre... that's also another story for another time and another day ... and I said 'so apart from Playback what are you up to?' and he says I'm about to start a master's degree in conflict transformation ... through the arts ... not conflict resolution but **transformation** ... I have called my practise for years transformational ... And I refer to all my work as being based in the arts ... so I asked ... where's that happening ... and he says at Marjons in Plymouth ... Marjons is only 25 minutes from my house ... are there still places, I ask ... I will give you the name and number of who you can call, he says ... to the course director ... two days later I'm in the office of David Oddie ... he's the same height as me, same shape, same age, involved in politics on the left, works with young people on the West Bank ... We talk about pensions, being a freelancer, left wing politics, the Middle East ... all very informal ... nothing about the master's degree ... and after about an hour he says 'well that will do for an interview would you like to register' ... Register? Yes register? So, I did ... and I went home, and I told Jane I was on a two-year master's degree programme ... how did that happen ... this was not something I knew was going to happen ... and of course you can begin to understand now why Jane did not want me registering for another five-year academic programme ... when it came to the PhD!*

*Anyway... I thought I was going to become an international peacemaker... particularly here... solving the Israel Palestine problem... And somehow, I moved from focusing on an external conflict to focusing on an internal conflict*

➤ *Point at chest to signify inner*

*I realised that if I was going to be a peacemaker first I had to make peace with myself... For years I had buried my head in the sand about Israel Palestine ... as an ex-combatant, left wing, peace activist, who had left Israel and lived in exile... who was I to say anything... I thought through theatre I might find a legitimate voice*

*Slowly I began to put together a one man show ... And then, on a call with my brother Danny, who lives here in Israel, the penny dropped 'it's not Israel Palestine, mo, he said it's your own conflict in your own relationship with Israel that you have to work out' ... And that is what mark Drummond and I worked on and what eventually became Moses Morris Harry & me ... quite unexpectedly it brought up the trauma of the Yom Kippur war when Machanayim was shelled and we had to rescue the babies from the baby houses and get them into the shelters under fire ... and I did not even know I had been traumatised... and so the process of devising, writing, rehearsing and finally performing became a healing process, a cathartic*

*transformational experience ... and that is what I am researching ... Is solo auto biographical theatre a process that consistently make a difference and produce a transformational experience*

- xvii. *working back one last time ... to the 1980s ... in my life I have been lucky enough to meet and work and learn from some pretty remarkable, unbelievable people... Since the 1980s I have been privileged to know Jeffrey Newman... Rabbi Jeffrey Newman... he buried my mum last year... he barmitzvah'ed Adam in 1993 ... He's been part of our lives, Jane and mine, for over 35 years ...*

*Jeff is an authentically spiritual man. He doesn't talk about it he just is... he doesn't have to say anything to be that way ... he is that way, wholly and completely... you may have someone in your own life like that ... when I came back from Israel in 1979 and was casting about for meaningful work, I applied for a youth work position in a reform synagogue in North London ... Jeff interviewed me... I found out much later I was the only applicant I was looking for a job, but I got a life... Jeff taught me what it means to be Jewish... not religiously... Not historically or culturally... But spiritually... Mostly through Buber, the Hasidic stories and prayer... how did it happen I don't know ...*

*Sometimes books just jump off the shelf and demand to be read*

*thank you.*

**APPENDIX FOUR: FEEDBACK FROM AUDIENCE TO UNTITLED WORK<sup>73</sup>**  
**(ACCO - ISRAEL - 2018)**

**Copy of Email Requesting Feedback**

This is a quick email going just to a few people to ask for feedback for my performance - I'd value it and it would be helpful for my thesis -

I've thought of a few questions that might be useful prompts/starting points - whatever you write is fine:

- In what ways was my presentation different from the other talks - did anything make it a performance rather than a talk?
- Was there anything you connected to personally - what did it cause in you, what responses did it elicit?
- What were you left with?
- Did anything about it work - in the sense of being successful - what didn't work?
- Did you experience any sense of a 'character' on stage?

Thanks

Mo

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<sup>73</sup> The material in this appendix attempts to capture the informality of the original emails I sent and received. They may therefore occur to the reader as unedited in their attempt to capture their spontaneity and immediacy.

## Feedback

For purposes of confidentiality the names of these audience members have been excluded.

### Audience member 'N'

Enjoy a great meal. Have an easy flight home. It was a pleasure being with you both at both Jacob's Ladder and the reunion.

Regarding your MEG presentation, it is your ability to sweep the audience into your life and to see from your eyes that is amazing. I love the way you use clothes, books, and other objects as props.

It is fascinating in both your plays that there is a randomness of place and opportunity, of timing, what we do and don't have control over

.....

Mo,

I wrote you, before you requested feedback, about your wonderful performance at the MEG talks. I don't save anything, so I do not have a copy of what I wrote.

I remember your incredible use of props, the way you pulled us into your story and experiences, the way your monologue seemed like a dialogue.

If you want me to answer any specific questions, just ask.

Audience member 'MK'

Hi Mo,

I have just come up for air after finishing my editing commitments - which rather fell on me after I got back from Akko.

How to answer you? - I'm not sure, but I'll try. Very odd seeing you after all these years, especially as our memories seemed to differ so acutely. You - as you said yourself - were not very nice on Machon, certainly not to me or to anyone else who wasn't in your little elite group. I say that in spite of the fact that our week together with everyone else last month was quite amazing, overwhelming, uplifting. Everybody pulled together, everybody even seemed to like each other - which was wonderful - and totally unexpected.

Your performance was different from all the other meg talks precisely because it obviously was a performance - at least, to me. No one 'talks' like that in a normal conversation, but that's okay, that's what you do. I don't understand this dropbox thing too well and can't see any videos, though I know D filmed all the talks, but - for me - it would be helpful to see your 'performance' again. A performance belongs to the theatre - not to an intimate, revealing conversation, or even candour. I enjoyed it - but as a theatrical performance - a character on a stage. I'm not sure that was your intention, or desire, but that was what I felt.

As for my personal reaction, I think I'd need to see it again. All of us on the committee were so hyped up about the whole thing working, or not, that I think some of us missed out on the simple enjoyment of the situation.

I would like to be proper friends with you now that we have both grown up a bit (fifty years tend to do that!). I hope that what I have written is useful, though I hope you will also use it with discretion.

.....

Just watched this - and enjoyed it again. Being politically unaware (relatively), some of the references passed over my head. So be it.



I am now aware that most of what you talked about - if not all - was, in fact, autobiographical. At least as far as your own formidable achievements go. However, you are a performer, and you performed to your audience, making it seem like theatre. I envy you and other people who find it so easy to talk in public and to remain articulate - that I can do in writing. When talking, I tend to fumble for words. Also, of course, I'm very much a behind the scenes person - I don't seek the limelight.

Met this morning with N, T G and I for brunch - just because. It was great, and I hope that we will be getting together again soon with the others on the committee.

M x

Audience member 'DH'

Now for my feedback.

I'm afraid I have to be brutally honest.

You lost me and I didn't pay full attention. I didn't realize it was supposed to be either a performance or a thesis. I thought it would be a personal experience (es) like most of the other talks.

When I couldn't see the 'point' you were trying to make the engineer in me lost focus.

Sorry.

But I agree with you on the reunion. A surprisingly great life experience I never thought it could be so good.

Best Regards,

D

Audience member 'DB'

Hi Mo

I couldn't agree with you more about the reunion. For me, the euphoria is mixed with a reasonably large measure of relief (you know you've planned well, but nevertheless, you don't really know whether it's all going to come together and work). Anyway, to your request.

For me, the talk (and it was, I felt, more of a talk than a performance) seemed not fully formed. It had an air of spontaneity which was not entirely a good thing because I was not convinced that you knew fully where you were going. I came away with no clear sense of what you intended to be the outcome, and with no real takeaway for me. I never really felt the impact of the serendipity of finding the book, which was of such significance to you.

An additional small disappointment for me was that, having mentioned your barber's strongly Glaswegian persona, you made no attempt to 'create' him - in build, by accent, by mannerisms, by mime - on stage. This left me feeling let down (why tell me he is Glaswegian if you then do nothing with that).

A couple of days ago, I watched the YouTube film of your Totnes performance of Moses, Morris, Harry & me, and what I have written above partly reflects the contrast between the

two pieces. Even on YouTube, there are very powerful moments in the performance, and it builds organically to its clear conclusion. Looking back to your piece at the reunion after viewing YouTube made me very aware of the (current) incompleteness, unfinishedness, of the later piece.

All of the above pulls no punches, and, while not apologising for that, I want to explain why I am comfortable sending this to you, rather than just diplomatically ignoring your email.

First - you asked for it, and I reckon you're a big boy now and can handle it.

Second - I hope, and suspect, that for you, as for me, the Machon community is a community in which you feel comfortable and unthreatened. It was only on the second day of the MEG talks that I suddenly realised that the extreme insecurity that I always feel (but, so I am told, manage to hide) when addressing an audience was completely absent. Machon is, in a very real sense, home; I knew I was among family.

Till the next time. All the very best to Jane and yourself

D

#### Audience member 'DL'

Hi Mo,

It was an extraordinary few days (and it has expanded my sense of the experience that your group shared together at a formative moment in your lives). I'm grateful for the peek into that world.

You ask for feedback to your presentation (and I'm pretty sure that this is the first request I've gotten for that, or I would have responded sooner). In response to your specific questions:

- (1) I would describe your presentation (and that of several others) as 'personal intimacy.' I was moved (and honored) that those of you who shared in this way felt comfortable to invite us into your lives in this manner.
- (2) Your particular technique had stylistic elements of 'performance' (e.g., the raised chair; the string of observations organized by topics; the directed 'conversation' with the audience). As I mentioned to you immediately after your presentation, at times I felt as if I were attending a Lenny Bruce performance. Lenny Bruce on stage simply was being Lenny Bruce. He did not offer up 'staged persona.' He presented a real

human who stood open and exposed, spoke candidly, and did not look for audience approval or buy-in. You presented in that manner.

- (3) My takeaway—from your talk and from presentations by others—is that we each have an opportunity to participate in and to contribute to the universe differently. The path we choose is not important. The values we bring to the table (and try to cultivate in the world) and the outcomes we try to achieve are. No one of us individually will change the world. But cumulatively, we have a shot at it (or at least at making a small dent of change).

Finally, thank you for taking on the responsibility of being an organizer of this event. It would not have happened spontaneously. The reunion required vision, enthusiasm, time, and a willingness to herd others. You and your colleagues brought all of that and more—and your investment paid off handsomely. Yasher koach on a job extraordinarily well done.

Love, (and Shabbat shalom).

D

Audience member 'MS'

Hi Mo,

Sometimes events occur with an uncanny synchronicity. I was just speaking about you while talking with a friend in Toronto when my phone beeped. It was your email arriving in my inbox.

I apologize for not having responded sooner to your feedback request. I'm still crest riding on a wave of adventure that has carried me forward from the reunion and continues without abating. I'd been waiting until I arrive back on Toronto's shore to catch up on correspondence, thinking that it would be a way to stay in Israel in my mind while checking the mail daily, if not hourly for my teudat oleh. So thanks for the gentle nudge... there's always time and there will never be enough.

Your Meg talk did have a specific personal appeal for me. Mind, at first I was a bit confused because I had the impression that you had to run and collect your props; there was a question

raised in your absence of time enough, then a wait time and when you re-entered it seemed as if you hadn't found what you went to gather and were apologizing for the ad hoc nature of what you were about to do. If that was all planned, it was very convincing. I have had to make do with what I had to hand on a number of occasions and so I identified however I was also disappointed/annoyed at the thought that I might not be seeing your planned performance but rather something you're slapping together on the spot. That shifted for me as the connectedness of all the seemingly random bits coalesced into a thematic whole. Again, a feeling I've had about my own life. I don't know what you intended to have happen for our audience, but that's what happened to me and I loved it. Mind, I'm very biased when it comes to you :-)) and came with the expectation and intent of finding something beautiful. I'm happy to respond further if you wish or have some specific questions but now I'm about to get in gear with Shabbat prep.

I am back in Katzrin (where, all conventional wisdom notwithstanding, I most want to be) and Menachem has set me up to spend Shabbat eve with Emunah and Moshe, who in turn have set me up to spend Shabbat morning with Michael.... like I said, still riding a miraculous wave here. Oh, and Just in case you don't know, please understand and accept that I do know the Neptune-like part you play in this oceanic voyage of mine.

With gentle tears of joy,  
Shabbat Shalom.

M

Audience member 'BB'

Hi Mo.

Well here I am back in the world of normalcy. Thank goodness I love my work.

D forwarded me your email asking for feedback on your performance, so here it is.

I loved the intimate feel. Unlike being in a theatre where there is a definite divide between the audience and the actors, your performance felt as though you were speaking personally to us as individuals. This made for a very relaxing atmosphere.

I also liked the fact that there were minimal props, which were very specific to the performance.

My concern was that I didn't feel a flow when passing from one part of the story to the next. It was almost as though you weren't sure what you wanted to say. I'm still not sure if that was intentional or whether you hadn't quite polished the performance!

It really was lovely meeting up again. The reunion was a great experience for partners as well, and I truly hope it won't be so long before we are able to get together again.

Love to both you and Jane.

B.

#### Audience member 'SD'

In what ways was my presentation different from the other talks - did anything make it a performance rather than a talk?

1. The initial flight from the room.
2. The constant reference to the fact that you didn't know what was coming next.
3. The apparent lack of structure - or planned outcome - other than the experience of getting through. it.

Was there anything you connected to personally - what did it cause in you, what responses did it elicit?

Initially I was concerned for you.

Then I was concerned that you - and the audience - were on an uncharted journey back into your life.

During a part of it, I felt it was 'messy' and would have been better with some structure.

Finally, as I mentioned to you, I felt the comparison of this presentation with the danger of stand up comedy - however, you avoided the dangers of audience participation and possible heckling.

What were you left with?

Knowing you and your genuine desire to retain contact with and learn from the past- I got it all, other than the totally random nature of the selections. I felt you could have deliberately focused on events during or following the machon and achieved greater effect. Did anything about it work - in the sense of being successful - what didn't work?

It was only because you were going to present that made me do the same - so that is a big thank you from me.

Your desire to be 'real' and to grow from it was very successful.

As I am a person who doesn't really like performance I was looking for more structure. Did you experience any sense of a 'character' on stage?

I was aware of it being you - and of my wanting it to be great and meaningful - I was not really aware of the presenter being a different character.

Hope these comments are of assistance - and read with the love with which they are written.  
S

#### Audience member 'NS'

Hi Mo,

I didn't send you feed back on your performance because I really didn't know what I thought of it, but since you have asked a few times I feel I should share my thoughts with you.

The business of turning one's subjective experience into art is something that preoccupies me. I wrote a thesis for a Master's in Creative Writing that was a collection of stories about a Holocaust survivor family (guess whose?). When I was younger I had an urge to write about myself, my feelings and my experiences. I often wondered if aside from the therapeutic release there was artistic value to them. Some of the things I wrote seemed like rants to me, in others I couldn't always find the point, or the worthwhile message.

I realize that it has become very fashionable to write directly about one's personal experience and there seems to be a value in simply seeing or reading what other people feel like or are preoccupied with. Of course there is the universality of any subjective experience. Anne

Frank's dairy is not just a Holocaust document, it is also very much a recounting of an adolescent experience.

So, I guess I would conclude that it can be a good thing, this kind of biographical presentation. It's just that we are inundated with this kind of thing, in documentaries, in all sorts of expressions-- articles, Facebook, etc.

Your presentation reminded me of a poetry reading. It was poetic, and well written. I suppose in this day of multi media, it may be nice to add video, or music, or photos to make it stronger. We are so overwhelmed by so much media, one has to work hard to make one's statement stand out and be strong, maybe...I'm not sure about these things.

I wish I had something more interesting or helpful to write and that this is something. For some reason, I feel like showing you something I wrote years ago about the check points. I sent it to a local English literary magazine that rejected it because, the editor wrote, 'there was not enough development of character'...a stupid criticism of this piece, I think. Maybe it was the wrong place to send it.

Best,

N



## APPENDIX FIVE: A SPONTANEOUS CREATIVE LIST OF RETURNS I DISCOVERED IN ISRAEL<sup>74</sup>

- ✚ *Like Mike Pearson - Return to place as a mnemonic.*
- ✚ *Returns within performance and landscape, biography and locality, memory and place.*
- ✚ *A return to beyond*
- ✚ *Return to Israel - place of birth, lived in for 10 years, place of 2 wars and a trauma.*
- ✚ *Return to belonging!*
- ✚ *Return to identity.*
- ✚ *Return to younger self.*
- ✚ *Return to language and culture.*
- ✚ *Return to Machanayim.*
- ✚ *Return to my friend's grave.*
- ✚ *Return to God.*
- ✚ *To spirituality.*
- ✚ *To religion.*
- ✚ *To source.*
- ✚ *To the divine.*
- ✚ *To relationships.*
- ✚ *To old girlfriends.*
- ✚ *To health not trauma.*
- ✚ *To being whole and complete.*
- ✚ *To possibility and the future.*
- ✚ *To relatedness.*
- ✚ *To Haifa.*
- ✚ *To Mayan Baruch.*
- ✚ *To Jacobs Ladder.*
- ✚ *To 19 years old.*
- ✚ *To my 20's.*
- ✚ *To the place I got married and the place Adam was conceived.*
- ✚ *To a war zone.*
- ✚ *Returns to the site of the story.*
- ✚ *Return to the hero's journey - a return after transformation.*
- ✚ *Return written like a Bob List.*
- ✚ *A return to many different stories*
- ✚ *A return to Israel.*
- ✚ *Return to the place of my birth.*
- ✚ *To a place of belonging.*
- ✚ *A Return to self.*
- ✚ *A Return to my history.*
- ✚ *A Return to the leadership programme.*
- ✚ *To old friends.*
- ✚ *To idealism and hope for the future.*
- ✚ *To the past.*
- ✚ *To a former self.*
- ✚ *To politics and possibility.*
- ✚ *To trauma.*
- ✚ *To The Return Journey - after transformation as in the hero's journey.*
- ✚ *To land soil and culture.*
- ✚ *To language.*
- ✚ *To the sacred.*
- ✚ *To heritage.*
- ✚ *To myself as a performer - as an artist.*
- ✚ *To myself as musical.*
- ✚ *To purpose*

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<sup>74</sup> This list is copied as exactly as possible from the original handwritten sheet written after my trip to Israel. It is deliberately unedited to capture its spontaneity and unplanned nature.

## APPENDIX SIX: WORKING FORMAT - WORK-IN-PROGRESS<sup>75</sup>

(DEVON 2018)

- *Let the audience settle ... and wait*
- *Enter from rear speaking as I walk*
- *Be big - put my funny persona on stage*

- i. *Sorry ... I was trying to find my jacket ... but I obviously must have left it here ... on this chair earlier this evening*
  - *Put on my jacket ... decide to take it off ... put it on a nail on the wall ... look at it and say*
- ii. *Good evening ... thanks for coming*
- iii. *I am not simply here to be with you this evening ... I am here to be. I am here to be a space for you to be. That's how Werner Erhard the creator of the est training would speak. I am not simply here to be with you this evening ... I am here to be. I am here to be a space for me to be and for you to be. I took the training in 1982 or 1983 and tonight is about how I got from there to here ... that is the thread ... remember that is the arc.*

*Actually, it might even be an even longer arc than that ... I mean here we are in 2018 ... at the end of 2018 ...and 50 years ago when I was 19... in 1968... 1968 by the way was the year that shook the world... and here we are 50 years later in 2018 another seismic year ...*

*One thing I can tell you is that the 60s changed lives ... I mean you only have to hear the names that were given... 64 summer of freedom 66 the year that changed everything 67 the summer of love ... 68 the year that rocked the world or the year that changed America ...*

- iv. *So ... Tonight, is an opportunity for us to be together ... not just to be together ... but to be together in a particular kind of way ... The Spanish poet Angel Gonzalez wrote 'another time will come that is unlike this one and someone will say 'you should have told other stories' and during the uprisings of 1968 someone posted those words over a doorway of a classroom in one of the universities in Mexico that the students took over ... Tonight is an opportunity for us to be together and tell other stories.*
- v. *Most recently I've been researching an actor called Ken Campbell who's a real niche performer but, in his niche, he's considered a genius... and he says that his dad wasn't very impressed by the idea of him going off to be an actor, but he didn't stop him he only gave him one piece of advice which was 'only do the funny stuff stay away from all that serious stuff'*

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<sup>75</sup> The format of the performance reproduced here also attempts to replicate, in as close a fashion as possible, the 'feel' of the original written notes I made to prepare for the performance. It attempts to reproduce the energy, flow, rhythms, pauses and pulse of the performance. It may therefore be perceived by the reader as raw, unedited or un-proof-read. This is a deliberate strategy that attempts to provide the reader with a sense of the original rendition.

- vi. *That's a problem for me ... because ... I have trouble doing funny ... sorry I just do ... in fact in rehearsals Mark and Suzi have been challenging me ... they say I'm like Trump ... that if only I could not take myself so seriously and not care so much about other's approval I might free myself up to be myself ... whatever that means ... I know I do take myself incredibly seriously ... people who know me cross the road when they see me coming so they won't have to have a serious conversation ... I'm obsessive too ... not about everything ... I think ... I'll probably need to check that out ... but I've been obsessed with Trump for the past two years ...*
- vii. *Anyway ... I do want you to know that the sixties changed lives ... it certainly changed my life ... it wasn't so much a decade ... it was more like an experience ... an explosion ... so tonight you could say is 'the sixties ... my part in it' ... the experience that changed everything ... and it's happening again ... isn't it? Everything is changing ... there is another explosion happening ... an explosion of hatred and violence ...*

*What will they call these three years 2016-17-18 ... the year of political shock and terror?*

*The end of civility ... 2017 the year that Nazism raised its head again... the year of the Klu Klux Klan ...*

*As well as the year of me too ... and of the women's voices*

*A time of no return?*

- viii. *When I prepared for tonight, I thought 'I just don't know what's going to happen' ...*

*I thought that because I'd had a couple of experiences performing in the past and things didn't go the way I expected them to ... things happening out of the blue ... that changed everything ... We were angry in the 1960s ... we took over our universities and town halls and brought cities ...brought Paris to a complete stop ... in 1968 we were angry because we knew people at the top were not telling us the truth and it feels like it's here all over again*

*I was 19 in 1968 ... in the 1960s I was angry, very angry ... I guess I am still angry ... and I had heroes, Bob Dylan, he was angry, and Joan Baez, she protested and marched for civil rights. Joseph Heller was very angry; he was protesting the absurdity of war and Kurt Vonnegut who was incredibly angry after witnessing the immoral fire bombing of Dresden in the Second World War. And Ché of course who gave his life attempting to liberate the oppressed poor in Bolivia. We were all angry. We knew we were being lied to over and over again. And they are all still my heroes.*

- ix. *Before I was 19 ... when I was 14 or 15, I wrote a poem ... I called it the truth ... I have still got it ... it's on a frame in my bathroom ... next to the loo ... that's how seriously I take myself ... it's short ... abbreviated ... actually, have you ever noticed how long the word abbreviated is ... mysterious ... like why there is only one monopolies commission ... some things are just mysterious I guess ... have you noticed that?*
- x. *The truth  
Wet paint*

*All around  
Tins and brushes on the ground  
Don't touch  
The notice says  
Wet paint  
Don't touch  
And yet they come  
To touch  
To test.  
The truth*

*We knew they were lying to us about the bomb ... about Vietnam*

*I wrote that poem because I wanted to know what was true... what's truth... last year I read this book about theatre and performance... Listen ... the editor Richard Schechner said about the director Jerzy Grotowski that he was spiritual and artistic integrity incarnate ... I wondered what that meant ... I have only ever known one person who I'd say was spiritual and he never used the word. He just embodied something true ...*

- xi. *25 years ago, Jane and I and our kids went on a road trip across America with Jane sister and her husband, and their kids and we stayed on a ranch in the mountains in Idaho the Diamond D that was 25 years ago and this year in August ... what's that three months ago... I heard a story about the Diamond D ... and what had happened since we were there ... on a family holiday ... it had become a brothel ... what the Americans call a whore house*

*So ... The Diamond D was way outside town, but it was known to operate as a brothel and when the brothel began construction on their buildings to increase their expanding business the local Baptist Church started a campaign to block it from expanding with morning, afternoon, and evening prayer sessions at their church*

*Work kept progressing right up until the week before the grand re-opening when suddenly - lo and behold - a miracle ... lightning struck the whorehouse and burned it to the ground!*

*The ... After the brothel burned to the ground by the lightning strike, the church congregation were all rather... actually, very smug in their outlook, bragging about "the power of prayer."*

*But then 'Big Jugs' Jill Diamond, the owner/madam, sued the church, the preacher and the entire congregation on the grounds that if that was what they were claiming ... then the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of her building and her business ... both through direct action and invoking indirect divine actions. In its reply to the court, the church vehemently and vociferously denied any and all responsibility or any connection to the building's demise.*

*So, The judge read through the plaintiff's complaint and the defendant's reply, and at the opening hearing he commented, I don't know how the hell I'm going to decide this case, but it appears from the paperwork, that we now have a whorehouse owner who staunchly believes in the power of prayer.... and an entire church congregation that thinks it's all bulls\*\*t*

*Just saying ... spiritual and artistic integrity ... right there ... No?*

- xii. *in my life I have been lucky enough to meet and work and learn from some pretty remarkable, unbelievable people... Since the 1980s I have been privileged to know Jeffrey Newman... Rabbi Jeffrey Newman... he buried my mum last year... he barmitzvah'ed our son Adam in 1993 ... He's been part of our lives Jane and mine, for over 35 years ...*

*Jeff is the person I was referring to ... an authentically spiritual man. He doesn't talk about it he just is... he doesn't have to say anything to be that way ... he is that way, wholly and completely... you may have someone in your own life like that ... when I came back from Israel in 1979 and was casting about for meaningful work, I applied for a youth work position in a reform synagogue in North London ... Jeff interviewed me... I found out much later I was the only applicant ... I was looking for a job, but I got a life... Jeff taught me what it means to be Jewish... not religiously... Not historically or culturally... But spiritually... Mostly through Martin Buber and mystic stories the Hasidim tell and prayer ... you know the Hasidim right the orthodox Jews who have big black hats and ear locks and beards*

- xiii. *I also met Roberta Mock ... she's my director of studies for my PhD ... I told you I'm doing a PhD right ... or you know that ... that's why I am studying Ken Campbell ... I met Roberta ... So ... And here's something else I did not know was going to happen... I stumbled into my PhD about four summers ago... I went down to Plymouth university to meet the head of the theatre department Professor Doctor Roberta Mock... Jewish... American... feminist... I mean what more could anyone want! Someone along the line had suggested I meet her... I only went for coffee... to network... to share what I was up to with solo theatre in Totnes and to hear what was happening at her end ... in the university and then see if something... anything emerged from the conversation ... pretty much nothing more than that... I went for a coffee and got a new life how did that happen! You just never know!*

*About 20 minutes into telling her about our groups and our festival and my performances and directing she says well that would make a very interesting PhD... I logged it ... I went home... told Jane... she begged me not to take on another big commitment and that it wasn't the right time... so I left it ... 6 months later it was still with me, so I went back to Roberta... and I asked her what she meant... she explained... I asked her what it would take... she explained... And she told me how to register... I think that was September or October 2015 ... and by January 2016 I was on the programme... it's 2018 now and I'm only beginning to realise what it takes ... and of course why Jane was right ... time is one of mysteries ... isn't it?*

xiv. *So, the first performance I did on the PhD programme ... a couple of years ago ... was in the Hex at Dartington ... now if you know the Hex in Dartington you'll know that it is tiered like big steps going up and for whatever reason I thought I was going to perform for an hour and in the end, I only was given 20 minutes ... Very abbreviated... stunted ... not just short ... anyway there I am ... I have all my 60s paraphernalia in my box from Moses Morris Harry & me ... which I drag on stage and layout on the floor ... and just as I'm about to start my monologue ... a couple right up at the top ... on the very top tier ... stand up and say ... we think we're in the wrong performance ... so I say where do you think you want to be ... and they say ... at the Dartington players ... and I say the Dartington players are over there in the other studio ... but they're not there now ... they're performing next week ... this couple are in the wrong place at the wrong time for the wrong performance which isn't happening ... and ... my audience has walked out of the door with the couple and I have to get them back ... so I say ... this reminds me of something that happened ... when I was growing up in the 60s and I went to the theatre to see a play called Oblomov ... Oblomov is a very serious Russian play ... and Spike Milligan was cast to play Oblomov ... Russian noble who is incapable of making important decisions ... so he takes to his bed ... anyway ... everyone know who Spike Milligan is ... he was a comedian in the 50s and 60s ... very zany ... one of the Goons ... and Milligan could not get to grips with Oblomov ... When he forgot his words, or disapproved of them, he simply made up what he felt to be more appropriate ones. and so he'd start improvising comedy ... and after three weeks the play closed unsuccessfully ... and they moved it to another theatre ... the comedy Theatre in London ... and they turned it into son of Oblomov Milligan starring ... and the night that we were there Milligan is in bed wearing a long white nightgown and a long white nightcap ... on these fellows come in late to a box over the stage Milligan stops everything that he's doing and says to these guys ... are you in the Navy ... and they say no mate were in the royal box ... and that was it Milligan was off .. turning the performance upside down and inside out. as Milligan rewrote the play ...*

xv. *So where was I ... Oh yes explaining how I got from there to here ...*

*let me let me ask you if the name XX (name changed for anonymity) means anything to anybody...*

*Take responses and explain to others*

*XX is or was a UK jeweller who inherited his father's business which was a national chain of jewellery shops ... and when he was asked on the radio in interview one time about the products in his stores he said 'they're crap' ... and the value of the shares in his business crashed on the stock market and the board threw him out... anyway here's the point XX was in my class at school and ... well, we had an initiation rite of passage... where we would go shoplifting... and steal books... Only he beat us all... and he stole a monopoly board... And*

*when we got out of the store and he showed us the board we said - but where's the box, you know where's the top hat and the little dog ...?*

*By the way ... someone asked me how long my performance is tonight ... and I answered I don't know ... I mean really, we don't know do we*

- xvi. *Remember what I said at the beginning that there are some things in life that you keep on looking for, but you never find ... and some things you find that you don't even have to look for ...*

*Well ... just before I began the PhD I went up to London and I went to Foyle's the book shop huge book shop it's like a block long and a block high in central London ... looking for all the books that I hadn't found in Totnes ... and yes, I do know that you can buy books online, but I like to feel them turn the pages ...*

*Well ... I could not find any of them... but this one book*

- *Show the book*

*The Grotowski Sourcebook ... just kept jumping off the shelf and wanting me demanding me to read it*

- *Ask the audience*

*Does anyone know who Grotowski is?*

- *And interact with responses*

*Well, I had never heard of Grotowski ... I knew nothing about him... but it flew off the shelf... I flipped through it, and I loved it... It's a kind of anthology... papers he'd written... articles about him... about his work and his life and his approach to theatre and to performance and to writing scripts and making theatre plays how to encounter the audience... And the more I read the more I liked him... he felt like a kindred spirit... It felt like a kindred spirit had just walked into my life... I went into a bookshop found out I found a life... how does that happen I had no idea that was going to happen*

- *Pause and let people catch up*

*His first theatre was only 60 kilometres from Auschwitz ... He was concerned with politics... I am concerned with politics... In one of the first chapters, he's called a Catholic Polish Hasid ... a Hasid ... I really liked him ... in the 1980s I had studied the stories of the Hasidim ... He says of himself that he has come 'to make holes in the wall' ... I love that ... that describes how I feel about my life ...*

*Another writer asks did he want to be the Werner Erhard of Eastern Europe... Werner is one of my most important teachers... if not my absolutely most important teacher ... in the 1970s Grotowski went cross country in the USA ... like Jane and I did ... and he might have met Carlos Castaneda ... in the 1980s I did my anthropology project for University on Castaneda ... by now I am falling in love with this guy even though I'd only just met him ... also in the 70s he took his theatre company out of the city and on to a remote farm where they cut wood and cooked on open fires and had activities in barns and walked in the forest sang and danced and climbed mountains ... all to create a free and authentic encounter between human beings ... and I went ... this sounds like summer camp in the movement ...*

*His concerns were my concerns ... his experiences echoed my experiences ... although we were a generation apart and from separate cultures, I felt like we'd travelled the same journey ... and he was dedicated to the liberation of the human soul!*

➤ *Pause so people can take a breath and catch up*

*And... one of his closest colleagues called him spiritual and artistic integrity Incarnate that he embodied spiritual and artistic integrity and that for the past three years has become my question, my quest, my inquiry, my journey, my process, my research into myself, my being and becoming what would it mean to lead a life of spiritual and artistic integrity - who would I have to be and become to live life, to live my life, like that ...*

*OK ... now ... remember the thread ... how I got from there to here*

- xvii. *In my life I have been lucky enough to meet and work and learn from some pretty remarkable, unbelievable people... Since the 1980s I have been privileged to know Jeffrey Newman... rabbi Jeffrey Newman... he buried my mum last year... here in this room ... and he barmitzvah'ed Adam in 1993 when we first moved to Totnes ... He's been part of our lives' Jane and mine, for over 35 years ...*



*Jeff is an authentically spiritual man. He doesn't talk about it he just is... he doesn't have to say anything to be that way ... he is that way, wholly and completely... you may have someone in your own life like that ... when I came back from Israel in 1979 and was casting about for meaningful work, I applied for a youth work position in a reform synagogue in North London ... Jeff interviewed me... I found out much later I was the only applicant I was looking for a job, but I got a life... Jeff taught me what it means to be Jewish... not religiously... Not historically or culturally... But spiritually... Mostly through Buber, the Hasidic stories and prayer... how did it happen I don't know ...*

*So, I say ... about Grotowski ... this guy is just like me ...*

*OK, remember the thread ... so now ... how come I'm doing all this theatre and solo stuff in the first place*

- xviii. *In 2007 and 2008 I had been working, a lot, in the National Health Service ... and I'd been involved in some life and death conflict situations ... acting as a mediator ... Around that time in Autumn 2008 I went to the first European Narrative Therapy and Community Work Conference in Brighton... on the last day of the conference I attended an amazing workshop ... about the power of the narrative approach to resolve conflict... It was about a stand off outside Toronto ... between members of First Nations tribes ... white residents of a Toronto suburb... the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the land developers ... who wanted to build on the reservation of the First Nation... and I made myself a note literally saying 'do a degree in conflict resolution' ...*

➤ *Pause*

- xix. *One week later I was at a birthday party talking to an old friend from my days in Playback Theatre... that's also another story for another time and another day ... and I said 'so apart from Playback what are you up to?' and he says I'm about to start a master's degree in conflict transformation ... through the arts ... not conflict resolution but **transformation** ... I have called my practise for years transformational ... And I refer to all my work as being based in the arts ... so I asked ... where's that happening ... and he says at Marjons in Plymouth ... Marjons is only 25 minutes from my house ... are there still places, I ask ... I will give you the name and number of who you can call, he says ... to the course director ... two days later I'm in the office of David Oddie ... he's the same height as me, same shape, same age, involved in politics on the left works with young people on the West Bank ... We talk about pensions, being a freelancer, left wing politics, the Middle East ... all*

*very informal ... nothing about the master's degree ... and after about an hour he says 'well that will do for an interview would you like to register' ... Register? Yes register? So, I did ... and I went home, and I told Jane I was on a two-year master's degree programme ... how did that happen ... this was not something I knew was going to happen ... and of course you can begin to understand now why Jane did not want me registering for another five-year academic programme ... when it came to the PhD!*

*Anyway... I thought I was going to become an international peacemaker... particularly solving the Israel Palestine problem... And somehow, I moved from focusing on an external conflict to focusing on an internal conflict*

➤ *Point at chest to signify inner*

*I realised that if I was going to be a peacemaker first I had to make peace with myself... For years I had buried my head in the sand about Israel Palestine ... as an ex-combatant, left wing, peace activist, who had left Israel and lived in exile... who was I to say anything... I thought through theatre I might find a legitimate voice*

*Slowly I began to put together a one man show ... And then, on a call with my brother Danny, who lives here in Israel, the penny dropped 'it's not Israel Palestine, mo, he said it's your own conflict in your own relationship with Israel that you have to work out' ... And that is what Mark and I worked on and what eventually became Moses Morris Harry & me ... quite unexpectedly it brought up my own trauma of the Yom Kippur war when the kibbutz I was living on - Machanayim - was shelled and we had to rescue the babies from the baby houses and get them into the shelters under fire ... and I did not even know I had been traumatised... and so the process of devising, writing, rehearsing and finally performing became a healing process, a cathartic transformationally experience ... and that is what I am researching now ... Is solo auto biographical theatre a process that consistently make a difference and produce a transformational experience*

xx. *OK ... Grotowski ... the source book ... so I am reading on and it says in the 1970s Grotowski went cross country in the USA ... like Jane and I did ... and he might have met Carlos Castaneda ... in the 1980s I did my anthropology project for University on Castaneda ... by now I am falling in love with this guy even though I'd only just met him ... also in the 70s he took his theatre company out of the city and on to a remote farm where they cut wood and cooked on open fires and had activities in barns and walked in the forest sang and danced and climbed mountains ... all to create a free and authentic encounter between human beings ... and I went ... this*

*sounds like Manifest ... the men's camp .. we hold every year on Dartmoor... and I think this guy isn't like me ... I'm like him ... in fact I am him ... I must be him ...*

*His concerns were my concerns ... his experiences echoed my experiences ... although we were a generation apart and from separate cultures, I felt like we'd travelled the same journey ... and he was dedicated to the liberation of the human soul! He must have reincarnated as me ...*

*And that's when this question ... what kind of life would I need to lead for people to say about me as I am dying Mo led a life of spiritual and artistic integrity*

*I find it an interesting question to be grappling with ... especially for someone who was written off at school in the 1960s as NOT artistic and NOT musical*

xxi. *Okay ... come with me again ... back to the 1960s ... I had a friend ... Micha ... that's a Hebrew name ... like mine is Moché ... he was actually Michel ... his Mum was French, and his dad was English ... so he was also Michael ... so you'd phone up and his Mum would answer, and you would say Bonjour Madam. P ... can I speak to Micha ... and she'd call out to her husband Cherie it's for Michel ... and he would call up the stairs Michael it's for you ...*

*anyway, I have to tell you about him ... he was more than angry ... he was apoplectic [...] He was so enraged that he took a drill to his skull to release the fury ... could not understand why The Beatles were so happy go lucky and dilettante and frivolous ... and why the rest of the world was "everything's okay let's look the other way"*

*Micha's father was a communist ... and as a young man had been in Hungary ... he had an affair with a woman from the Hungarian nobility ... and at the same time was sending back information to the Russian Communist Party ... but then the Hungarians found out and put him in prison ... tortured him ... and Micha's father ... well he didn't want Micha to have anything to do with communism or socialism or actually any kind of politics ... and all Micha wanted wants to be politically active add to be out on the marches protesting ... but his dad just would not let him ... so Micha found himself a really great outlet ... the most creative outlet you could possibly imagine ... he got involved with bullfighting... no kidding he was obsessed with bullfighting ... like I said his father was English and his mother was French so he was completely bilingual ... and now he lives in Mexico ... and he is trilingual ... but when he got interested in bullfighting ... he also got interested in Occitan*

➤ *Ask the audience who knows Occitan and interact with responses*

xxii. *It's the romantic language of Languedoc ... Languedoc is the area around southern France Monaco Toulouse and northern Spain ...*

*Any Micha discovered that in the middle ages ... in Languedoc they'd run the bulls through the towns on summer festival days ... I mean our festival is tame compared to what they'd do ... the young men would run in front of six or ten bulls ... before they went to the bull fight ... just to make them angry ... and the men who ran were call the fotadors ... like picadors or matadors*

*... but fot in Occitan is the rudest word ... foulest ... you don't say fot in Occitan ... but they did write poetry about the fotadors*

*Look ... I'm sure I do not have to translate this for you ...*

*Burlesque et Obscénité Chez les Troubadours : Le Contre-Texte au Moyen Âge*

*And here's one of their poems*

➤ *Read to the audience ...*

*Lo fotaire es tant de fotre angoissós:  
com plus fòrt fot, mòr fotant de felnia  
que plus non fot, qu'el fotria per dos  
de fotedors melhor de Lombardia*

*which loosely translates as ...*

*The f\*\*ker is in such throes to f\*\*k  
that the more he f\*\*ks, the more, f\*\*king,  
he dies of longing  
of f\*\*king more,  
for he would f\*\*k like two  
of the best f\*\*kers in Lombardia.*

*And you can just imagine the bulls charging through these narrow streets chasing these guys  
fotting their way through the streets of Lombardia ...*

*And Micha would read this poem to us all*

*And that's how angry we all were in the 60s ...*

*xxiii. In 1968 ... exactly fifty years ago ... we were on the streets fotting against the  
Russians who had just invaded Czechoslovakia...*

*It was this bizarre ...*

*We were marching ... actually I ended up marching with the Trotskyites ... I am not a Trotskyite  
... but these things happen ... don't they ... and we were listening to Radio Free Europe who  
were broadcasting from Prague*

➤ *Declarative and formal*

*An estimated quarter of a million soldiers have flooded into Czechoslovakia. Thousands of enemy tanks are rolling through the country.*

*And on the BBC - Fluff Freeman is playing Hey Jude by the Beatles*

➤ *Sing*

*Hey Jude, don't make it bad.  
Take a sad song and make it better*

➤ *Declarative and formal*

*People are building barricades here out of trams and buses, but when the tanks arrived, they just rolled over them.*

➤ *Sing*

*Hey Jude, don't be afraid.*

*You were made to go out and get her*

➤ *Declarative and formal*

*Demonstrators surrounded the tanks. They set one of them on fire here at the crossroads and that caused an ammunition vehicle to explode, totally destroying one of these buildings.*

*What the FOTT!*

xxiv. *How many of you know Joe ... the Barber in town, if you don't, he's Glaswegian... He talks with a thick Scottish accent... I've seen him three or four times a year for almost 25 years and mostly I have no idea what he says to me... He's probably one of the people I've seen most regularly in my life, and I can't understand him when he speaks... in April I said Joe... his name is Joe... can you cut my hair, so it stays long at the sides and the back like it was when I was a teenager... And short at the top and front like me as I am now, at 69 ... he looked at me as if I was crazy, so I explained about coming to the reunion... then he asked me if I had ever taken acid when I was 18 or 19... and I told him I had gotten close ... but how someone ... had interrupted ... So, he said when you perform at the festival tell them that acid takes 20 minutes to kick in and you just took acid 20 minutes ago and you have absolutely no idea what is going to happen ...*

xxv. *And today, tonight ... well actually yesterday ... is another of those moments ... when we don't know what's going to happen next ... I don't know how many of you follow the news ... I'm obsessive about politics and current affairs ... particularly USA politics and yesterday and*

➤ *Ask the audience if they know what has been happening in the USA and interact with the responses*

*this week bombs in envelopes have been sent to the Obamas, the Clintons, a previous democratic attorney general, a Democratic senator, the offices of CNN and to a retired CIA head. thank God this time none of them went off... but in 1968 ... .50 years ago exactly someone shot Robert Kennedy Senator Kennedy, someone shot Martin Luther King, Reverend Martin Luther King and unless something happens soon, and fast it's likely that there's going to be another tragedy in the states that will impact a nation for generations and will send ripples round the globe ...*

*xxvi. And I do not understand why we are not all apoplectic*

*xxvii. And that is a mystery*

*xxviii. And maybe it is a mystery about my own complacency! And integrity!*

*Remember spiritual and artistic integrity ...*

➤ *Hold a long silence*

*xxix. So just to bring it around*

*In the Sourcebook someone else writes that Grotowski walked around with a book... this book ...*

➤ *Show audience the book*

*I-Thou ... Grotowski walked around with this book in his back pocket it was his favourite and most influential book, and Buber was his most influential thinker... In the 1980s I studied Martin Buber and his approach to Judaism... with Jeff Newman*

*Buber describe living as the possibility of encounter he said - All real living is meeting ... an encounter*

*Live with uncertainty ... living with the mystery*

*So, to finish I want to tell you a Hasidic story*

*In a tiny village in the Pale of Russia in the 1700s one of the mystic rabbis lived and taught for 25 years... Everyday he would get up have breakfast cross the square go to his synagogue pray study see his congregants go home in the evening have supper and the next day he would do it all over again ... cross the square go to the synagogue see his congregants pray... study... And one day the Cossack policeman approaches him and says Rabbi where are you going? And the Rabbi says I don't know ... and the Cossack policeman says ... what do you mean you don't know... you have lived here for 25 years ... everyday you go across the square to the synagogue see you congregants ...pray study...go home have supper ... what ... what do you mean you don't know ... and he gets really irate and ties the Rabbi in rope and hauls him off to the local gaol ... and just as he is opening the cell to throw the Rabbi in ... the Rabbi looks at him and says ... see you just never know ...*

*And that is the mystery*

*Thank you, thanks for listening and good night.*

## APPENDIX SEVEN: INVITATION TO THESIS PERFORMANCE<sup>76</sup>

### 9 Ways to View the Performance

#### 1. As an invitation - which I extend to you, intimately, personally.

An invitation to bear witness

To what am I trying to achieve

in the context of the thesis.

I extend my community to embrace you.

An invitation to

Be-there, be-with.

Be with

that there is no ... here,

and there is no ... there

and there is no ... is.

Be that- there is no other.

#### 2. As Auto/biography - The story of myself

An opportunity - for me and for you.

For me -

A port

a harbour of time, space and will.

An opportunity

To write a new self into existence,

To speak a new self into the present.

To presence my self,

choose the past I wish to retain,

and be that choice.

To own my choices

Mine my past; and

Mine myself ... as mineness

---

<sup>76</sup> These verses were sent out as a poetic invitation to members of the audience. There are reproduced here, unedited, representing as closely as possible, the way the original email was written

*Auto self*

*Bio life*

*Graphis write*

Which is the story of my life

Which is the story of my life?

For you

An opportunity to see and hear

*An autobiographical performance*

*About an autobiographical thesis*

*about autobiographical theatre.*

And yet perhaps another -

An unpredictable moment of discovery

### **3. As a Myth - the myth of I - of I-me-mine**

What you are about to see

Is a maybe

May Be me

May be meeting

Fleeting ly

The only certainty

is uncertainty

The instability of I

The possibility of possibility

Of owning myself as possibility

Not history.

Not story

Or personality

Not

Identity or memory.



No-thing.

**A monologue - to accompany the thesis**

As a parallel line.

An alternative line

of investigation.

Of origin

or source

an (alternative) explanation

of a (his)tory

Like exegesis

attempts

to interpret, make sense

make meaning

of a picture

Or a text.

Drawing out

and

drawing on

the story

of the theatre

of my life

written and

performed.

Repeatedly.

**5. As Agada - Hebrew - as in legend, telling of an event or happening**

Agada comes from - to tell or declare.

A declaration

a commentary;

also to expand and make known.

I make myself known to you.

Agada is also a tale,

a fairy tale  
or anecdote.  
I am a teller of tales  
I am one long tale.  
Earlier  
in the Aramaic -  
to pull, spread, stretch  
and draw towards the teaching.  
Agada - a transmission.  
Between the generations.  
I am sending out a message  
Conveying an intention.  
Invoking a future.

#### **6. As an Abstract - Greek**

What is an abstract but an epitome - cut short  
a summary  
a short form that represents  
a larger  
reality  
here now -  
to perform in an hour (or maybe more)  
a life!  
to perform in fewer words  
than the longer composition.  
Epitome - also Greek  
a synonym  
for embodiment  
Here now - a live embodiment  
Of possibility.

#### **7. As a Midrash - Hebrew**

A midrash - Hebrew - from to tell  
from the root *drsh* -  
to seek, to seek with care, inquire.  
Midrash - a reimagining, a story - allegory,  
a look behind the words, beyond the text - to what has been left unsaid.  
A search for deeper meaning  
for me ... and for you.  
Not seeking answers  
but taking a journey (a pilgrimage?)  
posing deeper questions  
that yield insights and  
realizations.  
That occur as openings, not answers.  
As experiences of possibility.

#### **8. As a Development - Old French**

Unfold, undo, unroll  
Unwrap, unveil  
open the wrapping  
un-en-velope  
explain  
reveal  
and bring out the potential  
A movement from what was  
To whom I constitute myself to be.  
To build on words that have been tried before.  
Not lacking  
But missing  
what ever else was possible.

#### **9. From within the Community - Listen and watch - Locate yourself - as a space of already belonging**

To-gether (to gather) together

To love

and connect to the world.

**APPENDIX EIGHT: SCRIPT OF THE THESIS PERFORMANCE  
NOTHING - AN EXPERIMENT IN ENCOUNTER.<sup>77</sup>**

*Original format - plan - notes - springboard*

**June 20 and 21<sup>st</sup> 2021**

***This performance can be viewed at***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2lhNQu-qYI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbn5o3x-bCo>

**Section 1**

**Stage instruction**

**USE VOICE** - Inviting - not declarative - use pitch change not just volume change - to pull people in- to come on this journey for a couple of hours - let the audience know whether they are supposed to like or dislike something I'm saying, through the pitch/sound of the words - say the words as they are (e.g. truth is vulnerable, problem is negative), remember that every word creates a world... **FIND THE RHYTHM ... GIVE MYSELF TOTALLY TO THE TEXT and TO THE PERFORMANCE**

**DEEP BREATH / SIGH, EXHALE AND BEGIN SPEAKING**

**Section 2**

- i. Good evening - thank you for coming ...
- ii. For me performance is like prayer - I am still learning both.
- iii. How do we pray ... first we pray that we will be able to pray ... to get ourselves out of the way ... to surrender ... let be ... be with ourselves, be with each other ... be with the beyond ... prayer is not a box of tricks ... it is not a technique ... it is a space ... of connection ... we give away ourselves ... a sacred space ... in which we feel ... and know... we are under the eyes of eternity, we are resolute ... and we are to gether ... to get her .. together ... to get her

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<sup>77</sup> The format of the performance reproduced here also attempts to replicate, in as close a fashion as possible, the 'feel' of the original scrip I used during the performance. It attempts to reproduce the energy, flow, rhythms, pauses and pulse of the performance. It may therefore be perceived by the reader as raw, unedited or un-proof-read. This is a deliberate strategy that attempts to provide the reader with a sense of the original rendition.

***Gentile voice ... slow eke it out ... hu like who .... Like the wind ... voice goes up ... air ... man goes down ... earth ... divine is long ... infinite***

- iv. *The hu in human is divine - Human means from the earth ... just as Adamah אֲדָמָה the feminine means earth ... in Hebrew ... and adam - אָדָם... means human, and adom means red ... adam, adom Adamah ... all from the same root word dam דָּם which means blood ... earth and blood ... blood from the ground - Hu-man kind ... the first word of creation ... before that there was nothing ... and nothing was transformed into everything ... Hu ...BREATH INTO IT - Hu-man kind ... the first breath ... the something above ... beyond ... right here on earth*

#### **CHANGE TEMPO MORE UPBEAT**

- v. *... in fact, it was Martin's Heidegger's First Question ... why is there Something rather than Nothing ... to noth ... Like at school ... You boy! are you noth-ing right now ... see me in my study after assembly! How dare you noth in the school corridors*
- vi. *I guess you had to be at school in the 60s, like me, to relate to that ...*
- vii. *'Noth-ing,' (HAND GESTURE) is what the Nothing does, and this may just be the most important line in the performance and the central finding of the thesis just as we say the light lights, say the light lights up the night, we could say the world worlds into appearance, and the nothing noths ... and it is not just any-old-thing that noths' ... the only 'Something that noths, is the Nothing' ... that's me explaining Martin Heidegger to you ... too much? Too soon ... sorry ... stay with me ... it might get easier*
- viii. *Listen ... What we are seeking is not a change ... horizontal ... from right to left ... or west to east ... but a trans-form-ation - an elevation ... a verticality ... a new vector of perception ... not a diagnosis of what is wrong but an entirely new form - actually that may be what my thesis is about ... a new form - of consciousness ... from making and do-ing to noth - ing ... what do you do ... I'm a ... noth - er ... get it? ... an-other ... a-nother ... an-other, a noth e r... a maker of nothing*

#### **Stage instruction ...**

*Wonder - murmur for a moment ... mumble ... is this what it's about?*

- ix. *Sorry I'm just pondering if that's what it's actually about ... transformation encounter ...is encounter transformation ... who transforms ... is encounter noth ... ing ... from something to nothing ...*

#### **HAND GESTURE GRAPPLING**

### Section 3

*Sing -*

- i. *'first there is a mountain then there is no mountain than there is' ... C#*
- ii. *I've been grappling with that for 50 years ever since I first heard Donovan sing it*
- iii. *I could get the second line 'Caterpillar sheds its skin to find a butterfly within'*
- iv. *but not the first, 'first there is a mountain then there is no mountain then there is'*

### Section 4

**Stage instruction**

*More definitively ...*

- i. *Yup ... it is ... It's about ... Audience and encounter ... theatre is encounter ... a way of life ... a way to be ... encounter ... it is when I meet myself ... that's the transformative act ... When I meet myself the stranger becomes less strange ... Two people happen ... and become one ... Nothing intervenes ... Nothing ventured nothing gained ... Nothing and transformation ... Nothing deep and meaning less ... Two people happen ... and become one ... nothing between them ... in-fin-itude.*
- ii. *I've spent five years researching nothing ... I've discovered noth-ing ... I've found nothing ... five years dwelling in noth-ing...to dwell is to stay in ... five years staying in noth-ing*

**PAUSE ... HOLD THE SILENCE ... GIVE THE AUDIENCE TIME TO CATCH UP**

- iii. *Just over 50 years ago in 1968 the philosopher Gilles Deleuze asked the following questions.*

*What can I do, What do I know, What am I? ..... he said*

*The events which led up to 1968 were like the 'rehearsal' of these three questions. Just in case you don't know 1968 is the year that is known as the year that rocked the world... the year that changed everything ... we knocked the whole world off its axis in 1968 ... across Europe and the USA the crie de guerre was 'be reasonable ... demand the impossible'... but the authorities ... the people in power took it as a joke... not the expression of a new subjectivity or the awakening of a new consciousness*

*What is our light and what is our language, that is to say, our 'truth' today?*

*What powers must we confront, and what is our capacity for resistance, today when we can no longer be content to say that the old struggles are no longer worth anything?*

*And do we not perhaps above all bear witness to and even participate in the 'production of a new subjectivity?*

- iv. *And so ... today ... the events that led us right into 2021 were rehearsals ... for the production of a new subjectivity*
- v. *And if you were to ask me ... What can I do, What do I know, What am I?*
- vi. *Specifically ... what have I come to do? - I have come to liv-e my- live - out - loud (staccato)*

*And ... I'm not stopping ... who knows what we will find if we don't stop ... the moment you arrive you limit the journey you could have taken*

- vii. *Believe me I am fully aware that this is supposed to be autobiographical ... what ever that means ... but the t r u t h is ... or the problem is ... I am sick of my stories ... or at least I'm sick of being stuck inside my stories ...*
- viii. *I do know these stories ... they are the theatre of my life ... I know they are mine ... I have them ... I'm happy own them as my own ... they are in my blood ... and this is theatre ... where I tell you the story of myself and my world ... but...the stories ... are ... not ... me ... they ... ARE ... not ... who ... I ... am (staccato), they do not de-fine me ... I am fine enough ... always and already ... just the way I am ... my stories re-fine me - so really ... all I want to do tonight is meet you here ... and express the-way- I - see - the - WORLD (staccato)*

## **Section 5**

**Stage instruction** - close my eyes, visualise my breath ... Speak under my breath ... entirely to myself ... YA- WEH ... breath is GOD ... a thought ... **SING FROM GOD** the thought ... my view of the world ... faith and trust ... **ROCK AS IF PRAYING** ... performer sings in English- swaying as if davening/praying ... **start on the note of middle C**

**Join the speaking to the song through the word WORLD**

### **Sing English**

- i. *All the WORLD'S a bridge a very narrow bridge*  
*But the main thing to recall is to have no fear at all      piano app C GG*
- ii. *My bridge spans a space between the soft green rolling Hills of Devon and the sharp red volcanic mountains of the Golan Heights that overlook the Huleh Valley in the upper galilee - the place where I was bred and buttered ... and Jesus performed miracles and encounters with the divine*



- iii. *I wrote this originally 7 days after Biden's inauguration and 21 days after the insurrection on capitol hill*
- iv. *and ... there are still questions ... but the questions have changed ... from did he incite the insurrection to ..., to ... just what are the energies he serves ... Trump's not the problem ... he is a symptom of the problem ... he is the product of something else ... going on ... Trump is a human condition ... that's hidden from our view ... a hidden human condition ... the drift ... life is drifting ... the world is drifting ... humanity is drifting ... and no one has their hands on the rudder or the sail ...*
- v. *all unanswered questions - questions to dwell and distinguish ... not to answer ... there's nothing to answer ...*
- vi. *Since Trump ... the Rolling Thunder of the world is drifting... The ashes and the rubble of Gaza city - Ashdod and Ashkelon are still burning red and hot - the bodies of children of both sides are still fresh in the ground - I can still taste the salt of my tears on my cheeks - my throat is red raw from the howls of horror as I watched those... images from too far away ... for me to make any difference whatsoever.... the times may be a'changing, but some things aren't can't? Won't? The world has moved on Since Trump And Bobbie Dylan my first and longest love turned 80 and where are we headed ... the drift is pushing us into corners we could not see ... how we escape them is up to each of us*
- vii. *but those are not our questions for today ... even though ... I guess they are autobiographical because it's me who wants to know the answers ... I mean ... what isn't autobiographical ... really what is NOT autobiographical*
- viii. *maybe he's not downfallen yet ... or at least not what he represents ... what is invisible ...*

## **Section 6**

***Make this sultry and clammy ... and full of sarcasm ... make the connection between yellow and Trump***

- i. *'Oh do not ask what is it?  
Let us go and make our visit  
In the room the women come and go,  
Talking of Michelangelo,*
- The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the windowpanes,  
The yellow fog that rubs its muzzle on the windowpanes,*

*licked its tongues into the corners of the evening ...*

*lingered upon the pools that stand in drains.*

- ii. *Eliot was my A-level poet in 1968 when Deleuze asked those 3 questions.  
It has taken me more than 50 years to understand those lines from Prufrock ...*
- iii. *Do I need to spell it out ...? What can our light and our language, that is to say, our 'truth' today possibly be **when we are standing in the sewers** ... of our own making... drifting ... the events that led us right into 2021 were rehearsals ... for the production of a new subjectivity*
- iv. *What powers must we confront, and what is our capacity for resistance, today when we can no longer be content to say that the old struggles are no longer worth anything? And we stand in drains drifting.*
- v. *The mistakes, the wrong people in the wrong place at the wrong time, the wrong choices and the wrong decisions, half baked ideas, rash statements, shallow thinking, that is not thinking at all*

## **Section 7**

- i. *but here's a question for now ... for us ... you and me ... here now ...  
question - Why are we concerned with art?  
An answer  
To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness, fulfil ourselves.  
That's Jerzi Grotowski's answer ...*

### **Stage instruction** repeat and emphasise

- ii. *Question  
Why are we concerned with art?  
An answer  
To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness, fulfil ourselves.*
- iii. *Grotowski says that art is not a condition ... it is a process ... I like his ambiguity ...  
not a condition ... art is not a fixed state and art is not contingent or dependant on  
something / anything ... art comes from nothing*

## **Section 8**

**Stage Instruction ... pause ... then change tone, more personal**

- i. Here's a story ...

*My great grandpa Morris Myer came from a line of 12 rabbis ... going back to the 15 or 1600s ... because we don't have any written documents we don't know who they are ... so I don't know the truth of this ... but there was a rabbi ... a mystic Levi Yitzchak - Levi Yitzchak der Baremdigger - the merciful - although more commonly know as Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev - the village he came from - in Northern Ukraine - Yitzchak, Isaac is my middle name ... it means he will laugh ... I would be Moshe Yitzchak - my blood is Romanian and Polish not Ukrainian ... anyway, here's my point ... art is not a condition ... and ... Levi Yitzchak also said the Jewish condition is not a fixed state ... it's not something you study ... to discover truth ... but something you live ... to discover truth ... Levi Yitzchak came and he went ... he didn't found a dynasty or even a school ... k'yaduah - everyone knows - the house he built he built inside himself.*

- ii. *So ... Art is a process ... a process in which what is dark in us slowly becomes illuminated.*
- iii. *And being Jewish is a process ... a process in which what is dark in us slowly becomes illuminated. And that is the house we build inside ourselves ... never resting on our own presuppositions.*

**Section 9**

**Stage instruction ... as a kind of throwaway aside remark ...**

- i. *I have another question too ... I'm not really sure who is performing this piece this evening, which Mo is here with you? The doctoral student? A character on stage called Mo ...? Being performed by the performer who is also a doctoral student when he isn't performing?*
- ii. *God - who am I?*
- iii. *And honestly, I've tried to say everything I have to say in this performance. And maybe you'll need to see it two or three times to get it all... god knows I will ... I write because I don't know what I think ... until I perform what I wrote ... and have a chance to rewrite it ... and to inhabit it and make it my home ... but come on... for now, let it fall where it will... right now... cause there's only right now... right... and we can talk about it later... if there is a later, which we never know... Do we?*

*And*

- iv. *I have another question ... I am not even entirely sure what this is writing this ... at times it has felt like a personal exorcism - emptying myself of my demons, of the rubble of the past - demons that have hung around far too long ...*
- v. *other times I have felt like I am writing to discover something that I don't already know - that there's something out of reach ... hinting, inviting, teasing, beckoning, just like the mystery of Be-ing or Be-coming ... who am I? and what is this? ...*
- vi. *like my life really ... only by looking back at the life I have written, can I rewrite my past, and write my next chapter ... what is it they say, 'It's never too late to have a happy childhood'.*
- vii. *theatre is the space for writing that leads to a new self fashioning*
- viii. *we do not really own our stories ... they just live out through each of us.*
- ix. *Anyway, I want to share with you a discovery I made on the Monday before the insurrection in January ... which in a way symbolises everything I want to talk about ...*
- x. *I was telling a very good friend ... in fact my best friend ... Julian Marshall, who is a musician and a composer and quite a serious student of non-duality ... what ever that is ... or isn't ... I guess ... I was telling him about this performance ... and he said you do know don't you Mo ... that Wednesday - that was the day of the insurgency - is Holocaust Memorial Day... and I didn't - neither did I know at that time that Holocaust Memorial Day is commemorated on the day Auschwitz was liberated ... in January 1945 ... how did I not know that ... how did that fact escape me - shame on me - three score years and ten plus 2 as they say ... but that's an old family narrative you see ... shame on you if you don't know ... in my family it was more important to be smart than be rich ... God knows. The older I get the less I know ... or at least the more I know I don't know ... maybe I know nothing ... really ... maybe all I know is nothing... it's really subtle how these messages get passed down ... no one actually said Mo it's more important to be smart than rich ... but you pick it up from the stories that are told ... like the one about my Great Auntie Rosalind ... who, when her nephew, my Uncle Mike ... graduated in university and she couldn't remember whether he was at Jesus or Christ's in Oxford or Cambridge so she sent telegrams to Jesus Oxford and Jesus Cambridge and Christ's Oxford and Christ's Cambridge ... and that story is repeated when ever the family is to gether ...*
- xi. *... that's how you learn that being at university is valued ... and being at Oxbridge is really valued ... I'm just finishing over five years of a PhD at 72 years old and still wondering if I'll get to do anthropology at Cambridge ... shame on me ... that's the house I live in!*

## **Section 10**

**Stage instruction** - Performer sings Kol Ha'olam Kulo in Hebrew.

## Hebrew

כל העולם כולו גשר צר מאוד והעיקר לא לפחד כלל

piano app C GG

## Hebrew (transliteration)

Kol ha olam kulo, gesher tzar meod

Ve ha'ika lo lefached klal.

- i. *I want to share with you some cultural references ...*
- ii. *First - and obviously - I am Jewish - this is important to me - my friend Star once said to me back in the last century, in the 1980s Mo, You have hot s\*\*t Judaism - my hot s\*\*t Judaism, being Jewish, being a hot s\*\*t Jew informs who I am ... in my life.*
- iii. *There are family traditions on my mum's side of the family - the Myer side ... actually - they're less traditions ... more like handed down family narratives -like the hand me downs second and third children get - worn and torn and faded- actually they are perhaps even more accurately - myths - family myths - origin myths - that the trace our lineage back to the eighteenth century - the 1700s ... to the mystical Rabbi ... Eliezer Ben Israel - Master of the Good Name ... the Ba'al Shem Tov.*
- iv. *I don't know if they are true ... but because I'm sick of my other stories I'm supposing they are .... I've discovered that supposing is my best way not to get stuck on whether something is true or not ... very freeing ...*
- v. *Grotowski said ... and I like this a lot ... It's like the struggle between Jacob and the angel: 'Reveal unto me your secret!' ... But in actual fact, to hell with your secret. It's our secret that counts, we who are alive now ... so let's suppose these stories are True ... Not to do archaeology ... not to be right ... not for truth's sake ... Just to see what new perspectives and possibilities other stories open up.*
- vi. *The Besht - the Ba'al Shem Tov - wasn't just some ignorant country bumpkin - What Albert Einstein was to physics and Beethoven was to music -- the Baal Shem Tov was to Judaism ... to living Judaism ... and to releasing the human soul. - he wandered the remote and isolated Jewish shtetls - the villages of Eastern Europe - beyond the pale of settlement - performing miracles and wonders and transforming the lives of peasants and people in poverty. He founded the mystic stream of Judaism called Hasidism /Hasidut, in Hebrew - which means devoted or devotee or disciple - I will talk later about the Hasidism.*
- vii. *Actually, an even more absurd part of the mythology ... this Myer family mythology ... you know these stories that we all receive that are handed down from generation-to-generation mi-dor-le-dor as they say in Hebrew ...*
- viii. *... is that we can trace our lineage back another 1500 years ... one thousand and five hundred ... right back to Rabbi Meir of Tiberius in the second century CE The*

*Common Era ... when it was still Roman times around the time of Marcus Aurelias in Rome and Bar Kochba in Israel the revolutionary who led the uprising against the Romans ... Myer - Meir, Meir - Myer, that would make sense ... I suppose.*

- ix. *Rabbi Meir was called Ba'al Ha'Nes, the miracle worker and he was the illegitimate grandson of the Emperor Nero so I can suppose that I go back to Nero and mystics and miracle workers ...*
- x. *Let me tell you about Nero ... as everyone knows - k'yeduah - actually when the Hasidim say K'yaduah it means no one actually knows ... for sure ... they suppose too ... any way Nero ... the one that fiddled as Rome burned ... he obviously didn't fiddle cos there were no fiddles in the second century ... maybe he was playing golf as Rome burned ... or watching TV ... certainly not fiddling ... unless it was his taxes, which we are about to find out ...*
- xi. *Nero was a spoiled, angry unhappy man ... a tyrant ... extravagant and debauched ... meaning really corrupt ... he married his stepsister and had his mother killed ... he killed his second wife by kicking her to death ... all motivated by personal cruelty. he was a pretty vengeful guy ...*
- xii. *The senators and other people at the top all knew he was corrupt ... but the common people ... they thought he was great ... he built theatres and ... he was an actor ... an actor ... when he was about to die, he said What an artist dies in me!!*
- xiii. *Anyway ... here's the thing ... there are no actual documents of the time ... maybe someone put them on a secure server so no one could ever read them ... or maybe they burned as Rome was in flames ... I don't know ... there are some things you can just never know ...*
- xiv. *Any way the legend is that at the end, the senate declared Nero a public enemy ... but they got stuck in their debates and deliberations about how to punish him ... one idea was to beat him to death in public ... but too many senators continued to feel a sense of loyalty ... so they abandoned that idea ...*
- xv. *but in the meantime ... Nero got wind of their plans ... and he made all sorts of his own plans to escape ... but couldn't cos no-one would assist him, so it's thought he took his own life ....*
- xvi. *But... but ... but in the Jewish tradition he fled to the holy land ... and converted .... No kidding ... and from him came my ancestor Rabbi Meir of Tiberias ... who performed miracles ... and still today ... if you ever lose anything you just stop and say ... three times ... for the sake of the soul of Rabbi Meir the Miracle Worker may I find that thing which I have lost...and then you find it ... or more accurately ... the miracle is that it finds you ...*
- xvii. *But none of that is part of the dissertation or the thesis ...*

## **Section 11**

**Stage direction ... pause ... thinks ...**

- i. *Actually, I wonder if it could be part of the thesis ... part of those transgenerational stories that invisibly shape our lives without us ever really knowing ... the place where myths and legends and history all become one ... and one becomes an idea masquerading as truth ... imposing itself on our lives ...*
- ii. *Maybe I'm predisposed to resonate with mystics and miracle workers ... rather than working class revolutionaries and rebels ... maybe first you are a rebel and revolutionary before you become a mystic ... I mean I loved Ché in the 60s ...*
- iii. *Anyway ... who knows ... what do I know ... I suppose ...*
- iv. *Back to the cultural references ...*
- v. *I want to talk about Grotowski - Jerzy Grotowski ... also a kind of revolutionary and a mystic. He was Polish - not Jewish - a theatre director, producer, writer, teacher who changed the shape and the nature of theatre in the 1960s ... The American theatre scholar Richard Schechner and his closest colleague in the states called him the last Great Hasid of theatre... Ahah!! The connection?*
- vi. *I'm also going to talk about the philosopher, Martin Buber... Grotowski loved Buber... Buber was Jewish... And Buber's book... I-Thou... Was Grotowski's favourite book... Buber also collected the stories of the Hasidim ...*
- vii. *Buber was pretty contentious - what they say in the academy - a contested figure... he evoked very passionate often conflicting opinions about himself... And about his approach to Judaism ... Buber was a modern mystic ... a radical thinker... he did say that he had had an experience in which he attained a union with the primal being or the Godhead - Harry ... my grandpa... on the Myer side ... Who was a journalist in Israel and definitely not a mystic ...at least not from the way he would yell at the TV ... Harry probably knew Buber personally in the early 1950s ... he told me that there are people about whom you have to decide at once ... If you love them or hate them... He... Harry... Decided to love Buber... So did Grotowski ... And so do I ...*
- viii. *he ... Buber ... transformed my experience of being Jewish ... it is through Buber that I began to know and understand and experience Jewish spirituality ... that being Jewish isn't a condition ... it's a living reality ... that demands action in the world... more like activism than just any old action ... action that makes a difference ... like art.*
- ix. *I am also going to talk about Martin Heidegger... Another highly, highly contested figure. Unfortunately, Heidegger was a Nazi sympathiser - if not an outright Nazi - honestly that's another story for another time and another day.*
- x. *My grandpa Harry told me that Buber actually met Heidegger ... After the Second World War ... in Switzerland ... preparing for a philosophy conference - he described it as two dwarves meeting ...*

- xi. *They were both just about 5 foot tall... tiny men ... huge thinkers ... Who walked and talked and found the capacity to laugh about themselves ... 'Two elderly contentious men full of their own prejudices and resentments ... one against the Jews, the other against the Nazi Rector' and somehow managing to put the past in the past where it belongs ...*
- xii. *Which idea is in the thesis.*
- xiii. *The last reference you need to know is Werner Erhard- indeed another highly contested indeed controversial figure - American, now in his 80s, a teacher educator lecturer and inventor of probably the whole field of what we call today transformation or self transformation.*
- xiv. *My thinking is highly influenced by Werner- Werner was heavily influenced by Heidegger... It's not written anywhere but I'd say he was influenced by Buber too - and one of Werner's closest colleagues today works as a theatre professor in America ... and even though there's no documentation I'd bet that Grotowski has played a part in Werner's thinking... there's so much overlap.*
- xv. *So, Werner is still alive and active, 85 years old. Buber died in 1965. Heidegger died in 1976. Grotowski died in 1999 at the age of 66.*
- xvi. *Okay I hope all that helps... On with the show!*

## **Section 12**

- i. *Here's another bit of the story ... once upon a time ...*
- ii. *When I began the process of editing and re-writing my thesis, in preparation for submission later this year, I'd been re-visiting the work of Jerzy Grotowski, in particular the stage of his career which the director Peter Brook named Art as Vehicle.*
- iii. *In that last phase of his research before he died, Grotowski was focused on the transformation of inner energy... the energy of the performer from the coarser heavier everyday energy of being a human being in the world to a finer, lighter, higher energy that transmits and creates meeting - an encounter between people. An elevation.*
- iv. *There was a moment when I was reading descriptions of the work that I found myself wondering what Grotowski would've done if he had been in the midst of a pandemic, in lockdown, and was forced to produce a performance on Zoom....*
- v. *Now look it ... I know absolutely that what I'm doing ... here now ... is not what he would've done - but he would have said Mo keep working on yourself, experiment, take risks... So, with all my looking good at stake right now I am inviting you to bear witness this experiment in encounter ... and believe me I have abandoned trying to write something that is transformative ... that will or won't happen ... who knows*



*... and I've let go of the idea that I can actively create an encounter ... with you ... that will either happen or it won't ... who knows ... what do I know?*

### **Section 13**

**Stage direction** ... pause ...

- i. *And then it was 06-01-2021 - January 2021 Wednesday, the 6th of January and everything changed.*
- ii. *And I have to express how I see the world ... Lord I am sick of shallow conversations ... I am sick of chaff chaffs chattering, I am sick of the bleating*
- iii. *There's no encounter in chattering ... no possibility of encounter in opinion ... Heidegger called it idle chitter chatter ... no possibility .... conformity ... bleating ...*

**Stage Direction - Bleat like a sheep**

- iv. *Baa Baa Baa*
- v. *Grotowski said... ... I do not make performances to show what I already know ... he said I've come to make holes in the wall ...*
- vi. *you don't make holes in the wall when you are bleating do you? making holes in the wall requires presence ... from presence arises possibility.*

**Stage Direction** - space silence

### **Section 14**

- i. *But ... I do want to talk about encounter - but maybe that's an oxymoron - talk ... talking about encounter ...*
- ii. *I want to talk about Buber and encounter.*  
*I want to talk about Grotowski and Buber.*  
*I want to talk about Grotowski and encounter.*  
*I want to talk about Grotowski and nothing.*  
*I want to talk about nothing and audience ... And audience and encounter*  
*I want to talk about nothing and transformation.*  
*I want to talk about mystics and mysticism.*  
*I want to talk about Buber and Heidegger and Heidegger and being.*

*And being and nothing.*

*And I want to talk about the condition called Trump.*

- iii. *That's unfinished business for me ... sorry.*  
*Not quite finished, nearly finished, surely it must be finished.*
- iv. *That's a steal from Beckett - Endgame - a solo performance. I guess if this is a final performance for a PhD thesis it's good to have at least one theatre reference.<sup>78</sup>*
- v. *It's just over 10 years since I came out as ... a performer... since I felt comfortable enough in my own skin to say who I am is an artist.*
- vi. *Not a coach, or a business owner, who I am is an artist and a performer a solo performer and in that 10 years - particularly in the past five years - five years and 3 months to be exact... More and more people ask me about my performances... Where they come from... Who is influencing me who is shaping my thinking...?*
- vii. *In my first year on the PhD programme, I showed a piece about Trump ... back in 2016, in that performance I called him a racist and a bigot and a xenophobe and people advised me to tone it down and make it more oblique ... foolishly ... looking back ... I did ... baa baa baa ...*
- viii. *In 2018 two years later I wrote*  
*I woke up from the 1960s in 2016*  
*I woke up from the 1960s in 2016 after 8 years of the USA pretending, finally, to be safe ... fake it till you make it folks ...*  
*how's that going? Ha! Baa Baa Baa ...*

## **Section 15**

- i. *The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the windowpanes,*  
*The yellow fog that rubs its muzzle on the windowpanes.*

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<sup>78</sup> I wish to acknowledge an error I made here in the script. *Endgame* is not a solo performance. I also misquoted the original. The character Clov actually says "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished".

- ii. *the Trump condition was, is - more vile, more foul, more insidious, more perfidious ... more ensnaring of us all ...*
- iii. *still fiddling as the city burns ... actually... still stoking the fire in and in Arizona, and Gaza, and Jerusalem.*
- iv. *You may or may not know... some of you may remember that President Kennedy went to Berlin after it had been violently divided by the erection of the Berlin Wall and he went to the Brandenburg gate and thousands gathered to hear him speak... In his Boston Yankee accent, he said to the crowd ich bin ein Berliner we are all one ... well ich bin ein New Yorker and a Texan and a Washingtonian and a Californian ich bin ein American too because we are all connected ... and we should all be apoplectic ... there is no you and there is no I and there is no other.*
- v. *So, Listen ... I'm not an actual American ... You can probably tell... My wife is ... My kids both have American passports ... My in-laws are ... My nieces ... Their husbands and their children ... I had four real girlfriends when I was younger ... Jane and I married... That leaves 3 - 2 of them were American - one from Texas. One from New Jersey - when I was 16, I learned all 50 states so I could follow the news and more importantly, of course, impress the American girls that we were meeting when we were travelling in Europe - Alabama Arizona Arkansas Alaska California Colorado all the way through to Wyoming and West Virginia.*
- vi. *When I was 15, I was listening to American folk music political and protest songs you know Bob Dylan Joan Baez Pete Seeger ... The times they are a changing and we shall overcome ... I've done three long road trips across America ... I'm connected one way or another to America.*
- vii. *We all are... Whether we like it or not When I was **17** I was on the streets protesting the war in Vietnam and the Ku Klux Klan in **2017** I watched the Neo Nazis and the Klan march again in Charlottesville chanting Jews will not replace us holding burning torches marching through the night ... on Wednesday, the 6th of January 2021 I saw a man on TV in the US capital wearing a T-shirt with camp Auschwitz printed across his chest ... camp Auschwitz ... camp Auschwitz ... like Butlins or Club Med.*

## **Section 16**

**Stage Direction - Sing ... A A G F# E D**

- i.      *He was my brother  
Five years older than I  
He was my brother  
Twenty-three years old the day he died*
- Freedom rider  
They cursed my brother to his face  
'Go home, outsider,  
Mississippi's gonna be your buryin' place*
- He was singin' on his knees  
An angry mob trailed along  
They shot my brother dead  
Because he hated what was wrong*
- He was my brother  
Tears can't bring him back to me  
He, was my brother  
And he died so his brothers could be free  
He died so his brothers could be free ...*
- ii.      *And that song is so much more than a song ... for me ... it's a story and a history  
and a world and a choice and a possibility ... my life is in that song ... I heard that  
song when I was 15 years old in 1964 or 1965 ... the first time I ever went to a folk  
club ... the year Paul Simon on his own without Garfunkel was touring the UK  
playing in folk clubs ... and maybe it was Paul Simon singing it that night and maybe*

*it was not ... and maybe I'll never know ... but that song changed my life ... I didn't know you could write songs like that ... and that was the fork in my life when I chose a life of left-wing politics and social activism and a commitment to freedom for all people ... I went from Paul Simon to Irish Rebel songs straight into the arms of Bob Dylan ... between the times they are a changing and another side of Bob Dylan ... before he invented rock in 1965 the night he went electric at the Newport folk festival and music forked too.*

## **Section 17**

- i. *The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the windowpanes,  
The yellow fog that rubs its muzzle on the windowpanes.*
- ii. *in Israel Palestine Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, in Myanmar, Ethiopia massacres, murders, stabbings, ... climate change ... covid passports ... the sewers of fragmentation, separation ... estrangement we should all apoplectic.*
- iii. *I came into this doctoral process with Trump himself and I am going out with The Trump condition - he ... he may be out of power but the Big Lie lives on ... not just in America ... in the sewers.*
- iv. *By the way ... not to be foolish or fooled again, again ... and to be 100% clear about how I am seeing the world right now ... the big lie is a lie so 'colossal' that no one would believe that someone 'could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously'. That's what Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf.*
- v. *The mechanisms that create and sustain big lies the yellow fog live on ... they have not gone ... they live on fragmentation, separation ... estrangement ... in the drift and in the sewers.*
- vi. *Grotowski said he came to make holes in the wall ... my cousin Richard Berengarten who also went to Cambridge, and is a poet said this ...*
- vii. *'I am responsible for this seed landed here called human, to root it through and through me, till every pore breathes ... yes, I will speak ... I must ... and of these*

*things too ... this plant that grows from our speech ... in joy here, I name community' ...*

- viii. *you all are my community.*
- ix. *Grotowski's first theatre was only 60 km from Auschwitz - that's the distance from Plymouth to Exeter - one of his first ... of only a few ... major theatre productions ... Acropolis was - what was it? It was not about Auschwitz, it did not portray Auschwitz, it did not represent Auschwitz - it confronted the reality of Auschwitz - it made it real - he brought it to life ... 20 years later.*
- x. *Grotowski asked what is Auschwitz... And he answered... It is a world that functions inside us... Auschwitz is the trial of humankind... It is the cemetery of civilisation... he said, we search for something beyond Auschwitz ... that which is Misery and impossible ...*
- xi. *The sewers ... the drift.*
- xii. *Schechner says Grotowski speaks in tongues not unknown Hasidic Jews ... that makes sense ... he was surrounded by the Hasidim in Poland ... even as the chimneys were belching smoke.*
- xiii. *What does that mean to speak in tongues? To go on when you cannot go on ... to voice what is real that reality hides ... to speak when there is nothing left to tell ... To keep speaking and prevent the inevitable.*
- xiv. *I imagine 80% of my life is gone past ... 20% left to go ... 1/5 of my life still to come ... 1/5 left to live ... that sounds better, doesn't it? I still have 1/5 of my life yet to become ... 20 years ... 20 years is not nothing ... I am already six years older than Grotowski when he died ...*
- xv. *So ... I plan now to walk out ... out of my past into unknown possibilities ... unknown... unseen ... so far unspoken.*

## **Section 18**

- i. *On the other side of my family ... I have 10 first cousins ... on my dad's side... the Cohen side ... the Cohen cousins - when we are together, we feel like a clan ... Cohen means the high priest.*

- ii. *I have a cousin Maurice, like me, only he is MAURICE. Maurice has been researching the Cohen family tree - our ancestors - on the Cohen side ... and during the lockdown we have been meeting monthly on Zoom and Maurice has shared his findings with all our cousins including bringing along cousins who I did not even know about.*
- iii. *I'm 72 and I have cousins that I did not know about ...*
- iv. *but more than that ... Maurice told us that my Dad's parents and my cousins grandparents ... Lebel and Gittel made it out of Poland before the war ... but Maurice has discovered they had brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles ... who did not make it out of Poland...*
- v. *I always thought and I always said my family escaped the Holocaust... But it isn't true ...*
- vi. *And I try to imagine my great uncles and aunts and my cousins one or two generations before me in those trains ... as they carried them away.*
- vii. *Stories that come from survivors tell us that some danced and others sang and many prayed, but I do not know if my aunts and uncles and cousins went to their death singing or dancing or praying ... what else don't I know ...*
- viii. *And the man on my television screen wears a T-shirt printed with camp Auschwitz climbed through the window ... as he stormed the peoples house!*
- ix. *The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the windowpanes,  
The yellow fog that rubs its muzzle on the windowpanes.*

## **Section 19**

- i. *I came into the doctoral program on January 1, 2016 - my first performance was called 1966 - I was 17 in 1966 ... Bob Dylan was 25 - he was 80 this month - I was linking my life as a 17-year-old in 1966 and the events of 1966 to the events of 2016 and to my life as a 67-year-old ...*

- ii. *Then Trump was elected in November 2016 - November 8 - the next day - November 9 - I was driving to North Devon I stopped for a coffee about halfway - it was early morning - I stood in the queue, in front of me was a man - a woman joined him - they clearly knew each other - I did not know them - as she arrived and greeted him, she said... And is there a mushroom cloud on the horizon today? ...*

**Stage Direction - Sing**

- iii. *I heard the sound of a thunder that roared out a warning  
I heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world  
I met a young woman her body was burning  
I'm a-going back out 'fore the rain starts a-falling  
... it's a hard ... it's a hard ... it's a hard rain's gonna fall.*
- iv. *There is an old, very old, ancient story told about my ancestor - my great grandpa 5 times - the mystic Ba'al Shem Tov. Whenever he saw misfortune threatening it was his custom to go to a certain part of the forest, light a fire and say a prayer... And a miracle would be accomplished, and the misfortune would be averted.*
- v. *Later, when his disciple the great teacher of Mezerich had occasion to intercede with heaven he would go to the same forest and say 'Master of the universe, I do not know the prayer, but I am still able to light the fire; and the misfortune would be averted.*
- vi. *Much later to save his people again Rabbi Moish Leib of Sassov said' Lord I am lost unable to light the fire I do not know the prayer, but I know this place and that must be sufficient; and it was and the threat was averted.*
- vii. *then it felt to Israel of Risheen, who sat in his armchair and spoke to God saying' I do not know the place, I do not know the prayer, I cannot light the fire; all I can do is tell the story and that must be sufficient; and it was.*
- viii. *'I too am a child of my people I have heard the call to add my story my chapter to this unfinished story I am a stage in its journey a connecting link between generations ... the dreams and hopes of my ancestors live on in me I am the guardian of their trust now and their future ... I must tell the story'.*



- ix. *That's how the late Rabbi, Dr Lord Jonathan Sacks said it ... it's true for me too ... I too am a child of my people I have heard the call to add my chapter to this unfinished story ... I must tell the story, however much I am sick of it! I must tell my story ...it is story I choose ... to own ... to be part of me.*
- x. *Grotowski says performer is a person of action they are not someone who plays another they are a priest a worrier conscious of their own mortality. Grotowski asks ...*
- xi. *what is your process ... are you faithful to it or do you fight against your process? ... The process is something like your destiny ... what is the quality of your submission to your own destiny ... and I am asking you too.*

## **Section 20**

- i. *I like performance - I like art - performance helps me discover who I am it helps me discover what it means to be hu-man. As I see It the job of the performer is to name the unamiable, to stand for something, not stand on the side-lines observing, not to drift, To take sides to shake the world ... and shape the world ... to wake the world up and stop it falling asleep again ... over and over again... another one of those possible ancestors Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk said 'the middle of the road is meant for horses ...*
- ii. *And I like politics real politics ... politics in the realm... in the realm in which we attempt to realise some of our highest aspirations ... the politics of personal freedom.*
- iii. *Autobiography is the politics of personal freedom ...*
- iv. *Auto self... Bio life... Graphis write ... write a life of self... Myself ... I want to be author of my life...*
- v. *Why would I keep looking backwards to the past why wouldn't I turn and look forward to the future ... autobiography is a revolution ... autobiography is revolution.*
- vi. *And yet I find myself prisoner of my past.*

- vii. *Must I look back to make sense of myself? I'm telling you ... Only to find the hidden possibilities. I am not interested in the archaeology of the past... only in the undiscovered possibilities that lie in its ruins and in its rubble.*
- viii. *To write the life I want to write. To write the self I want to be, to be-come ...*
- ix. *Remember Levi Yitzchak ... like me he was a terrible non-conformist ... got him into all sorts of trouble ... he was totally indifferent to public opinion ... I suppose he was one of my great great grandfathers ... so, supposing he was, it lets me understand why I love this song ... it's a song about a nonconformist who was an activist and died for his beliefs ... that was his submission to his destiny*

**Stage Direction - Sing Joe hill - start on G E GG - cling the lines**

- x. *I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,  
 Alive as you and me.  
 Says I 'But Joe, you're ten years dead'  
 'I never died' said he,  
 'I never died' said he.*
  
- 'The Copper Bosses killed you Joe,  
 They shot you Joe' says I.*
- 'Takes more than guns to kill a man' bold*
- Says Joe 'I didn't die'*
- Says Joe 'I didn't die'*
  
- And standing there as big as life*
- And smiling with his eyes.*
- Says Joe 'What they forgot to kill intimate*
- Went on to organize, quieter*
- Went on to organize'*

*From San Diego up to Maine,  
In every mine and mill,  
Where working-folk defend their rights,  
It's there you find Joe Hill,  
It's there you find Joe Hill!*

*I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,  
Alive as you and me.  
Says I 'But Joe, you're ten years dead'  
'I never died' said he, 'I never died' said he.      Slow down.*

**Stage instruction** - Hold a silence.

## **Section 21**

- i. *It is hard to speak about inner life ... by the way I love the word ineffable... it's wispy... it disappears as it is being spoken... it feels like breath on icy windows... it means inexpressible... beyond words... Inner life is ineffable ... like performing... Performing... I've come to believe that there's more than inner life... there's inner life... and there's innermost life... that's the place of the soul that's the place where we reveal our soul*
- ii. *So as the author Douglas Adams says 'Let's think the unthinkable, let's do the undoable. Let us prepare to grapple with the ineffable itself, and see if we may not eff it after all.' ...*
- iii. *I am bored with the past  
I am sick of history  
History is a noose*
- iv. *They built a gallows with a noose outside Capitol Hill outside Congress ... they stormed the building yelling hang Mike Pence.*
- v. *To be clear I am not a fan of Mike Pence -*
- vi. *But ... The all forgiving, faithful, turn the other cheek, love thy neighbour Vice President became the Judas in the story and the faithful went wild ... just like Trump told them it would be... come to Washington on January 6<sup>th</sup> it will be wild he said*

- vii. *In December 2020 trumps justice department was reviewing the use of hanging, gas chambers and the firing squad for death penalty sentenced prisoners.*
- viii. *Pence... Trump ... History ... all a noose.*

## **Section 22**

- i. *In the last years of his life Buber bonded with an Austrian Jewish psychotherapist Anna Maria Jokl... Buber asked her shortly before he died, what she as a psychotherapist thought was the source of angst - he said... Freud says angst stems from a terrible childhood, from terrible childhood experiences, I had a terrible childhood and I do not have angst...*
- ii. *Anna Maria was lost to answer at first... Then said after a long silent reflection, I believe angst is ... not to belong ...*
- iii. *And Buber replied... yes, that may be ... Not to belong ... why else would someone build gallows?*

**Stage instruction** ... pause let the silence and the question hang in the air ... and ask again with emphasis ...

- iv. *Really, why else would someone build gallows?*
- v. *Ironically ...I spent hours searching for a quote about belonging ... I could not find it... I did not know where it belonged ... I knew it was about making your home inside yourself finding that inner space which lets you rest exactly where you are. You are where you are. You always are.*
- vi. *Eugenio Barba the director and student of Grotowski and his great friend wrote to him saying ... Dear Jurek, anywhere can be home ... I don't think Grotowski ever really had a home ... all his life he was looking for home ...*
- vii. *And then of course when I stopped looking, I immediately found it ... Quote ...  
'most peoples lives are spent attempting to recover the shape, smell or feel of rooms that they first knew as a child... You may not find a house or space that*

*actually does resemble the space of home, but one may eventually be able to recreate that safe protected secret shell for oneself.*

## **Section 23**

*This is a song about home and belonging ... now I know why I love it*

**Stage Direction - Sing** Mingulay Boat Song ... meditate first ... hum ...rock like a boat

- i.      *Heel ya ho, boys, let her go, boys*                      *piano app start on D E G*  
         *Turn her head round in to the weather ...*                      *(cling the lines)*  
         *Heel ya ho, boys, let her go, boys*  
         *Sailing homeward to Mingulay*

*Wives are waiting by the pier head*  
*Gazing seaward out of the heather*                      *intimate*  
*Turn her head round and we'll anchor*  
*Ere the sun sets on Mingulay*

*Heel ya ho, boys, let her go, boys*  
*Turn her head round into the weather*  
*Heel ya ho, boys, let her go, boys*  
*Sailing homeward to Mingulay.*

- ii.      *I think to know you belong is to know you exist, that you count, that you matter ...*  
         *in the 1960s we did not know day to day if we were going to make it through ... if*  
         *the world would exist tomorrow*
- iii.      *... we did not know if we would see tomorrow... the mushroom cloud hanging over*  
         *us during the Cuban crisis ... the space race in the air raid drills ... hiding under our*  
         *beds wrapped in our coats ... Dr Strangelove ... we knew our existence hung on the*  
         *thread of the US president's temperament and judgement ... it was only 20 years*  
         *since Hiroshima and Nagasaki ... ban the bomb was a rallying call ...*
- iv.      *... here's a song about Hiroshima*

**Stage Direction - Sing** *I come and stand at every door*

- v. *I come and stand at every door  
But no one hears my silent tread  
I knock and yet remain unseen  
For I am dead, for I am dead*
- I'm only seven although I died  
My eyes grew dim, my eyes grew blind  
I need no sweets nor even bread  
For I am dead, for I am dead*
- All that I ask is that for peace  
You work today, you work today  
So that the children of this world  
May live and love and laugh and play*

**Section 24**

- i. *In the 1980s I had a teacher Eugene Heimler who was a survivor of the camps he told me everyone has their personal Auschwitz ...*
- ii. *When Buber was three years old, living in Vienna Austria, his mother ran off with out bidding him farewell - he watched her from his apartment window, leaving - disappearing out of sight without looking back. she just suddenly disappeared and as far as he knew no one knew where she went ... and the young Martin was sent to live with his paternal grandparents far away in Galicia ... Galicia is in western Ukraine ... honestly at almost the exact same time my great grandma was put on a horse and cart and taken by her father from Vienna to Focsani in Romania to marry her second cousin ... 1000 miles ... a ten-day trip ... just to give you a sense ...*
- iii. *Buber's grandparents never mentioned his mother to him at all ... I guess back in those days they didn't talk about it anymore than was absolutely necessary and from all accounts Buber assumed for years that she would come back ... he always*

*assumed that one day she would come back ... until one day when he was still a child, his babysitter who was a few years older than himself ... she was a neighbour taking care of him ... she told him ... no she will never come back ... and Buber said much later on 'I had no doubt about the truth of her words they cleaved to my heart and every year they cleaved deeper and deeper and after 10 years I came to understand that this was not just about me but about all persons ... and after another 10 years he says he coined the term Vergegnung which means mismeeting*

- iv. *... and when Buber grew up, he did finally discover that his mother had runaway to Russia with an army officer where she lived and she had two more daughters and Buber's father also remarried and when Buber was 34 and married himself his mother finally came to see him and to meet his wife Paula and their two children Raphael and Eva and Buber says when I looked into her still astonishingly beautiful eyes I heard from somewhere as a word addressed to me Vergegnung mismeeting*
- v. *But Buber's conclusion was not about mismeeting ... instead he learned about meeting ... about encounter ... that all real living is meeting ... he held on to his mother who was absent and his father who was absent but still present ... and he refused to choose one over the other or to give up on either and he held that tension ... that mystery of the coincidence of opposites ... he understood that not everything is harmony ... yet you do not split apart ... all his life he held that tension and he understood deeply about life ... about I and thou and what it means to really be with another not split apart, not separate, meeting ... belonging*
- vi. *When I read this story, I felt something... something moved inside me, I was moved, something dropped into place... This is why Grotowski said that Buber's book was the one he always kept in his pocket, he too had lost a parent ... he was trying to reconcile something ... just like Buber in his own Polish way ... he was struggling, striving, daring ... to become whole and complete... his entire life journey was about becoming whole himself ... we focus on his Theatre but we lose sight that this was always a personal journey of healing .. recovery ... redemption*
- vii. *When Grotowski was six World War II broke out, Poland was invaded by Germany, Grotowski's father was in the army and was shipped over to England, Grotowski and his mother and his brother moved out of the home and into a very rural village where they spent the rest of the war. After the war Grotowski's father moved to Paraguay never went home Grotowski never saw him again.*
- viii. *And I wonder if abandonment isn't the exact flipside of belonging, and I wonder if May 1968 isn't the exact flip side of January 2021 community and belonging versus*

*alienation and abandonment ... both from the same source ... expressions of hope and fear ... at what the world could become ... meeting and mis meeting ... refining or de fining*

- ix. *Grotowski asked what do you want to do with your life? Do you want to hide or reveal yourself? This is the quest - the quest for what is the most essential in life - the likeness of God, the Sun, touch, the Milky Way, grass and river*
- x. *But you know ... that wasn't only or simply what dropped into place .... It suddenly became obvious is that it is my story too ... and that I'm doing my journey to wholeness through solo autobiographical Theatre ... solo with others ... meeting, encounter*
- xi. *I am responsible for this seed landed here called human to root it through and through me, till every pore breathes ... yes, I will speak ... I must ... and of these things too ... this plant that grows from our speech ... in joy here I name community ... you all are my community ...*
- xii. *and there was something else too ... about other performers that keep calling me ... that keep attracting me ... that I keep connecting with ...Spalding Gray ... his mother ... committed suicide ...and Ken Campbell...his mother died, he had lost his mother when he was only thirteen ... and Lisa Kron's father was a survivor of Auschwitz ...*
- xiii. *abandonment and belonging ... and theatre and performance and performer and audience and community  
... and prayer*

## **Section 25**

**Stage Direction** - read as a prayer, as an incantation - emphasising nothing

- i. *In the midst of beings as a whole, between us an open place occurs and there is a clearing There is a space ... a place of nothing ... which is empty ... from which something can be revealed ... A gap in the world ... standing at the moment before anything means something, nothing stands between us .... Not an answer or a solution not even an experience only the opening of a question that has never been asked before A question from which I experience the world ... I stand on nothing At the heart of my existence I discover nothing There is nothing happening not inside me not outside me not in my head Nothing is at the extremities nothing. Nothing*



can stop me Nothing can change that Nothing can move what so There is nothing  
to do nothing to predict Nothing could have prepared us ... I come back to nothing  
...

**Stage Direction** - Recite in Hebrew

- ii. Ani omed rek  
rek ani be sheket  
Ani maleh  
maleh ani be sheket  
Yichieh she yichieh

I am empty  
I am empty in silence  
I am full  
I am full in silence  
I am that I am  
I will be that I will be

**Stage Direction** - speak with real compassion

- iii. Those people outside the capital building outside Congress they too were lost ...  
abandoned ... the unbelonging

**Stage Direction** - repeat with sadness

the unbelonging

**Section 26**

**Stage instructions** - recite sadly ... not singing

- i. All the worlds a bridge ... Kol ha olam kulo

ii. *And some of you may be asking ... what about Werner ... so here's my Werner story ... it's a story about nothing ...*

iii. *Est and glass balls*

*In 1982 I took Werner's first personal transformation training est ... 4 days ... two weekends ... 60 hours ... at the end of those 60 hours I had a direct experience of nothing ... an unmediated encounter with nothing and experience of pure being ... I asked a question ... what does that mean and David Fisher the est trainer said ... put your hands out like this and imagine that there is a glass ball on each hand ... now put them together very slowly ... picture the balls .... (mime the balls coming together)*

*And I got it*

*And I looked up at David and I said ... you mean there's nothing out there*

*It was a spontaneous, direct unexpected all at once instantaneous un-mediated pure experience of nothing.*

*It was the sense that I (my mind) creates everything, my world, my experience, my reality. That I alone am the source of everything I think, feel and see.*

*I 'got' that I am entirely responsible for my life. I own it ... That there is no one to blame for anything that has happened to me; not me nor anyone else.*

*I felt in that moment at one with myself and with the entire universe ... I was not in a world; I was the world ... I was not in a void; I was the entire universal void.*

*I had entered that gap in the world ... And on the other side I experienced that I am connected to everything and that everything is connected.*

*The only words I have to describe this is that it was a cosmic experience.*

*I had an experience that there is nothing outside of myself and that that nothing is also everything.*

*I knew that everything is nothing ... I am nothing and simultaneously I am everything.*

*All this happened in an instant, and it was an experience beyond language; words cannot capture the experience, they are only the description of the experience from a distance.*

*I was able to see my (his)story for what it is - a endless continuum of interpretations - I got to realise that while I have a story, I am not my story - that my essential - being is not my story or my history, it is nothing.*

*This was an experience of pure being- pure in the sense that there was only being, nothing else. It was not religious or spiritual, and it was both.*

*I saw who I was, who I am and who I can be in the world. I was entirely and absolutely free, to be myself. Freedom is the being of being.*

## Section 27

**Stage Direction** - sing in full in English and in Hebrew.

### English

- i. *All the world's a bridge a very narrow bridge  
But the main thing to recall is to have no fear at all*

### Hebrew

כל העולם כולו גשר צר מאוד והעיקר לא לפחד כלל

### Hebrew (transliteration)

- ii. *Kol ha olam kulo, gesher tzar meod  
Ve ha'ika lo lefached klal*

## Section 28

- i. *Around 2017 I discovered ... a place ... I called it at the time artistic activism... but I didn't really know what it ...or I ... meant when I wrote that ... I discovered it... that place... back then ... just recently in April I discovered another place ... embodied activism ... embodied artistic activism ...*

*early in April towards the end of a long walk with my walking buddy Malcolm ... he was complaining about the Johnson government taking away our rights to demonstrate and protest ... them without realising quite what I was saying I said... but I may not be able to go the forest ... I can still perform... and I can still sing... and I can still tell the stories... I **can** perform... and that's why I'm doing solo... that's why I'm doing autobiography... that's why I'm choosing to be a performer ... Because art is freedom... art is resistance... art is rebellion... art is transformation... and autobiography is political... autobiography is revolution... And so far... so far ... even though Grotowski had to move to America ...they can't take that away... not yet at least ... not from you... not from me... and not from us ... we can all live out loud... one of my ancestors ... Rabbi Zusia was on his death bed and all the Hasidim... his disciples... Gathered round and he told them ... when I get to heaven the Angels aren't going to ask me why weren't you Abraham why weren't you Isaac... they will only ask why weren't you Zusia ... my name is Moché Yitzchak ben Ruben Ha'Cohen Morris Isaac son of Reuben the Cohen. The high priest and I have come to make holes in the wall*

*goodnight ... and thank you ... thank you for noth-ing.*