PSYCHODRAMA, A THEATRE FOR OUR TIME*

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When God created the world in six days he had stopped a day too early. He had given Man a place to live but in order to make it safe for him he also chained him to that place. On the seventh day he should have created for Man a second world, another one, free of the first world and in which he could purge himself from it, but a world which would not chain anyone because it was not real. It is here where the theatre of spontaneity continues God's creation of the world by opening for Man a new dimension of existence.

From the introduction to J. L. Moreno's *The Theatre of Spontaneity*

OF THE RUNG OF LOVE, THE HASIDIM SAY:

When senseless hatred reigns the earth, and men hide their faces from one another, then heaven is forced to hide its face. But when love comes to rule the earth, and men reveal their faces to one another, then the splendor of God will be revealed.

From *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*, written down by Judith Malina and Julian Beck.

INTRODUCTION

The reason I left the Yale School of Drama was to search elsewhere for what I originally had gone there to find. I found the promise of what I was looking for in the psychodrama—the therapeutic theatre of J. L. Moreno. This paper endeavors to show that the developmental roots of psychodrama, particularly Moreno's theatre of spontaneity and his theory of spontaneity-creativity contain the seeds for a theatre for our time, at once containing the psychodrama and going beyond it. This paper represents a significant step towards the realization of a longstanding dream I have had for such a project in the theatre.

When I was at the Yale School of Drama (1966-1969), many of my fellow students were seeking something other than a career on Broadway. There

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were, of course, those who were interested in "making it" in the legitimate theatre, television or the movies. For them, theatre was a career where they were clearly marketable commodities in one of the most competitive, but potentially one of the most profitable, industries in the western world. Though only a few actually "made it," those who did were gods of the media and of our civilization. Semi-divine exponents of our materialism and concretized incarnations of our commercial dreams, they were blessed with instant fame and kingly riches. However, most of the students who were preparing themselves for the *business* of the theatre were pragmatic. They were prepared to join the ranks of the many, poorly paid, largely unemployed theatre people; occasionally happening on a "soap" or a commercial to tide them over to another season. They already knew they were entering one of the most soulless businesses of our time.

But there were a few others—myself included—who were in a *theatre* school to discover the magic and the power of a community of living human beings coming together to share in a performance of live human beings. We were also seeking something more than the occasional brilliance of interaction between live actor and live audience, or to put it another way, the secrets of great theatrical production. For most of us, we were after some notion of healing, of religious experience, after the roots of theatre and of ritual itself. In the wasteland of Western technocracy, in this world of automation and rampant materialism, the mass media, movies and television speak of the essential alienation of man from himself and his fellows amidst a frenzied overabundance of commercially motivated sensory input. We looked to the theatre—or to some new revitalization of this ancient form—as a return to life, and a return to ourselves.

In psychodrama, and in the theatre of spontaneity and the ideas behind it, I see the outlines of the answer to my quest.

MORENO'S THEATRE OF SPONTANEITY

The theatrical nomenclature and trappings of psychodrama are a clear indication of its derivation. It was during the period when Moreno was involved in his theatre of spontaneity that he happened on the psychodrama. Moreno tells us, "it had nothing to do with therapy. It introduced a new art of the theatre and the drama . . ."[1] It is within this early body of work, and within Moreno's underlying spontaneity-creativity theory, it seems to me, that the bases for a relevant and revolutionary theatre for our time still exist, waiting to be resurrected.

The aesthetic of the theatre of spontaneity is contained in this poetic passage from a mature rendering of the same doctrine which was at the heart of Moreno's youthful endeavors in the theatre:

> Even the greatest possible amount of stored-up spontaneity and creativity could not make a butterfly anything more than a butterfly. Yet even the smallest amount of "free" spontaneity, summoned and created by a being on the spur of the moment—a product, in other words, of the moment—is of greater value than all the treasures of the past, of past "moments." Spontaneous creativity—however supreme it may be in itself—once conserved is, by definition no longer spontaneity; it has lost its actuality in the universe. What "conserved" creativity truly represents, at best, is power, a means of expressing superiority when actual superiority has ceased to be available.[2]

Moreno accrued value to the becoming, to the actualizing, to the creating, to the status nascendi of creation—the actual experience of creativity—and actually devalued the creative product as such. In so doing, he turned topsy turvy the basic assumption of theatre, and of creative endeavor in general. He states in *Theatre of Spontaneity*:

> The contrast between the theatre as we know it and the spontaneity threatre lies in their different treatment of the moment. The former endeavors to present its products before an audience as definite, finished creations; the moment is ignored. The latter attempts to produce the moment itself and, at one stroke, to create as integral parts of it the form and content of the drama.[3]

And:

> While the legitimate theatre places the spontaneity process backstage (in space) and prior to the performance (in time)—in the creation of the script, the creation of the roles and the study of them, the designing of the settings and the costumes, the formation of the ensembles and the rehearsals—the spontaneity theatre brings before the audience the original, primary processes of spontaneity, undiminished and inclusive of all phases of production.[4]

At bottom, Moreno was experimenting with what was to prove a theoretical framework for his life's work. This had to do with the basic duality he divined at the source of the universe: that of spontaneity and creativity. During his life, Moreno has devised not only a system of therapy, particularly the psychodrama, which specifically works to retrain spontaneity pathology back to health, but also the system of sociometry. Moreno's view of social organization and of society and civilization itself rests on this same ruling principle.

The essential problem with man, Moreno maintains, is that he fears spontaneity and thus opposes it:

> Although the most universal and evolutionarily the oldest, it (spontaneity) is the least developed among the factors operating in Man's world; it is most frequently discouraged and restrained by cultural devices.[5]

The reason:

> If spontaneity is such an important factor for man's world, why is it so little developed? The answer is; man *fears* spontaneity, just like his ancestor in the jungle feared fire; he feared fire until he learned how to make it. Man will fear spontaneity until he will learn how to train it.[6]

In order to understand the meaning of "training" spontaneity, which is at the fountainhead of his theatre of spontaneity, we must understand that all these concepts are linked together in an ever moving gestalt: spontaneity and creativity are inextricably linked together. (See Canon of Creativity Diagram in the Appendix.)

> Spontaneity and creativity are thus categories of a different order; creativity belongs to the categories of substance—it is the arch substance—spontaneity to the categories of catalyzer—it is the arch catalyzer.[7]

The other element of the dynamic complex at the heart of Moreno's crowning conception is the cultural conserve. From Moreno, these residues of spent spontaneity and creativity are, at once, the underpinnings and signposts of civilization and also the shackles against which the whole of mankind is perpetually straining.

> The struggle with the cultural conserves is profoundly characteristic of our whole culture; it expresses itself in various forms of trying to escape from them. The effort to escape from the conserved world appears like an attempt to return to paradise lost, the *first* universe of man, which has been substituted step-by-step and overlapped by the *second* universe in which we live today.[8]

This return to the *first* universe was indeed Moreno's cardinal intention. One can trace this trend clearly in the theatre of spontaneity. For him, the legitimate theatre was committed to the conserve, the written script. Plays were created in the past, for the future. Moreno was interested in returning to the *moment* of creation. His idea of the theatre was to get to the core of the actor—through all his learned and conserved clichés. It is almost as if Moreno were seeking a return to the Garden of Eden. Once there, he would vie for the Tree of Life and reject the Tree of Knowledge.

> When we removed, by a process of deconserving, one conserve after another from an actor, and nothing remained but his naked personality, the pre-conserve man came closer to our understanding. He must have been guided by the warming up process inherent in his own organism, his master tool, isolated in space, unspecialized yet, but working as a totality, projecting into facial expressions, sounds, movements, the vision of his mind.[9]

The unleashing *and* training of spontaneity, the driving force of creativity, was likened by Moreno to the coming to terms in the nineteenth century with the

unconscious. While the unconscious was the lowest common denominator of man, Moreno saw spontaneity as the highest common denominator; and he saw the destiny of the twentieth century, and of mankind in general, as dependent on the successful unfolding of man's relationship to spontaneity. On one level, at least, Moreno's unique approach to the theatre must be viewed in this light.

The resonance of these ideas with our current experience—psychological, cultural, political, ecological, spiritual—is profound indeed. For me, Moreno has more successfully than any other theorist put his finger on what so many have searched for in this century within the theatre. They have been searching not just for an earlier form of theatre to return to, but for a complete turnabout, a whole new way of thinking about the theatre. We must totally reject the product orientation of the society around us in the theatre itself. We must train ourselves to overcome all the blocks and clichés that our lives have imposed on our spontaneity. We must return, as members of a theatrical community, to some kind of original, dynamic, unifying innocence. This notion is so radical and wide ranging in its ramifications for the theatre and for art in general that it is not easily grasped, let alone digested. For one thing, the whole striving after perfection is rejected in favor of the adventure of being-in-the-moment of creation. Moreno speaks here of the playwright for the traditional theatre:

> The author, like the wicked father in the fairy tale, has no mercy on his own children. He kills the first born for the benefit of the last born . . . One function of the theatre for spontaneity is to take under its wing those abortive art works. It is the sanctuary of the unwanted child, but so to speak only those children who do not want to live more than once . . . Our tendency is to depreciate the experience of adventure in lauding our product.[10]

The essential humanism of this theatre of Moreno's is evident in the following passage as is the all inclusive nature of his revolutionary vision. No aspect of production is exempt from the radicalization. (He is here comparing himself to the Russian experimentalists Wachtangow, Tairow and Mayerhold.)

> The difference between my own stage construction and those of the Russians was that their stages, however revolutionary in external form, were still dedicated to the rehearsed production, being therefore revolutionary in external expression and in content of the drama, whereas the revolution which I advocated was complete, including the audience, the actors, the playwright and producers, in other words, the people themselves, and not only forms of presentation.[11]

As for the actor:

> That which for the legitimate actor, is the point of departure—the spoken

> word—is for the spontaneity player the end stage. The spontaneity player begins with the *spontaneity state;*[12]

And:

> The legitimate role player has to be untrained and deconserved before he can become a spontaneity player. Here we have another reason why so many "non"-actors pass the test for spontaneity work successfully. Their fountainhead is life itself and not the wirtten plays of the conventional theatre.[13]

But not all the actors who performed in the "Stegreiftheater" were amateurs. Not by a long shot. Among the actors on the staff of the original Theatre of Spontaneity were Peter Lorre, Anna Hoellering and Robert Grunwald, to name a few. Two of the noteworthy playwrights who tried their hand at spontaneity-playwriting were George Kaiser and Franz Werfel. It also came to the attention of many important psychologists of the day: among them Alfred Adler and Theodore Reik.[14]

In spite of all this notoriety, the reason for the demise of the Theatre of Spontaneity is complex. Moreno speaks of the enormity of the task; how he soon realized that he had to train audiences in spontaneity and out of their deeply imbedded preconceptions about theatre. He also tells of the disappointments with the actors and how some of them deserted the movement and returned to commercial enterprises. Obviously Moreno was way ahead of his time. It will be shown later in this paper how no one in the theatre of the 1970s has yet fully realized his ideas, and Moreno's Theatre of Spontaneity was in its heyday from 1922-1925.* The other development was, of course, that in his work in the Stegreiftheater he happened on the therapeutic results of his procedures on the personal problems of some of the participants and spectators. In short, the fact that Moreno was too far ahead of his time combined with the emergence of psychodrama and led to the demise of the Theatre of Spontaneity.

Moreno points out that his theatre always had reference to mental hygiene and to the educational value of spontaneity training. Very naturally, it seems, and gradually, a therapeutic theatre sprouted and grew. Of course, the blossoming of psychodrama has been of inestimable value to the whole field of psychology and mental health. To say that Moreno turned his attention from the theatre after those early years of pioneering with the Theatre of

*Actually there were two basic periods in the history of Moreno's Theatre of Spontaneity. The first was the sponatneity theatre for children in 1911, which took place in the gardens of Vienna, and also in a private home. The second period was connected with the "Stegreiftheater" itself, a spontaneity theater for adults during the years 1922-1925. One of the notable offshoots was "die Lebendige Zeitung." This and other elements were performed periodically in America until about 1931.[15]

Spontaneity is to miss entirely the aesthetic majesty of psychodrama itself. It is unfortunate that until now more contemporary practitioners of the theatrical arts have not come to terms with the implications inherent in psychodrama, and in spontaneity-creativity theory.

One wonders how different might now be the history of the drama and the current offerings of the theatre had Moreno not turned his primary creative imagination and energies to the scientific and clinical spheres. Certainly the seeds for a revolutionary theatre are still contained in his writings and it remains to us to find more suitable fertile arenas in which to plant them.

APPROACHES TO MORENO'S PRINCIPLES FOR THE THEATRE

Major evidence for the prophetic and visionary nature of Moreno's thoughts about the theatre is that they predate the most radical ideas and projects the theatre has seen. In fact, the implications of that slim volume have yet to be fully realized. As one reviews the more important achievements in contemporary theatre, one sees a trend: approaches have been made in the direction of a theatre of pure spontaneity as Moreno suggests. However, the complete realization remains an ideal implicit in his writings, yet to be actualized on the stage.

We are still locked into the conserve as the only legitimate goal for making art. If anything, more so. The conserve is product. Where else but in materialistic America is product not only more important than process, but the only good, the god before which all else is subordinate? The end is all, the means insignificant. One need go no further than the front page of today's newspaper to see this all too clearly. You can consume a product, and this is the consumer society *par excellence*. The value of something is to find out how marketable it is. The average American artist values himself in terms of the product he produces rather than on the quality of the processes by which the product was created. So in the theatre certainly, the play is the thing, not the playing. This is true for the performer, the director, the playwright and every other production specialist.

There are exceptions to this. Some notable exceptions will be considered. It will be shown how they too only represent *approaches* to Moreno's ideas. But that an approach to a theatre of pure spontaneity is being made is incontestable. It is as if various giants have been taking hikes up and down foothills around this mountain. At the top, in the clouds, is the theatre of pure spontaneity that Moreno envisaged more than fifty years ago. How soon will someone scale the mountain and build his theatre at the summit?

THE ALIENATION OF THE ACTOR FROM HIMSELF

Let us, for a moment, consider a working definition of the theatre; the spectator and the actor are the necessary participants; a designated place for

the spectator and a designated space for the evolution of the action are the spacial components; the purpose is the representation of experience by the actors and the communication of that representation to the audience. What then is the primary mode of representation and communication for the theatre? It is not primarily movement of the body as it is in dance, although theatre almost always involves movement and the body. It is not primarily visual representation as it is in all the fine arts, although once again theatre involves visual representation and communication, whether of the action itself or supporting the action architecturally and in terms of actual settings, costumes, lighting and other visual, "plastic" elements of production. It is not primarily sound as it is in music, nor primarily language as it is in poetry or prose. Clearly theatre almost always directly involves music if not musical principles and actually rests on the use of language. One can make a case for any of the above arts to serve as a metaphor for the mode of theatre; and in certain cultures, especially primitive and eastern examples, one or several of these arts are closely intertwined with the theatre. But the key, essential mode of communication in the theatre as we know it here in the West, which it shares with no other art in quite the way that it expresses itself in the theatre, is the *actual experience of the actor himself.*

I propose the notion that as civilization developed, the distance in the actor between his own personal experience—i.e., his own spontaneity and creativity—and the experience represented and communicated to the audience in the theatrical events in which he performed became greater and greater. What emerged was the playwright as a discrete functionary apart from the actor. Originally the playwright appeared not as a single individual but as an evolving tradition passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. (This was later true in the Commedia dell' Arte and other secular theatrical traditions.) Finally the playwright emerged as a full fledged professional, whose job was the creation of written scripts and specific roles for the actors to play. Thus with the appearance of the playwright as a separate function in the theatre came the emergence of the conserve in the theatre. As time went on, the mode and form of theatrical art, as well as the subject matter it dealt with, was fastened by different playwriting traditions, and was conserved in various cultures in different ways. Retrospectively, we call the characteristic aspects of conserves of other times conventions. But regardless of the specific conventions surrounding any of the recorded theatres of the West, it is clear that the actor became subservient to the conserve. It appears that in the twentieth century we are returning to the issue of the relationship of the actor, phenomenologically, to his own experience. As we have become increasingly alienated from ourselves, so we have felt increasingly alienated from the theatre. And those that have chosen to revitalize us by revitalizing the theatre have, however inadvertently, been forced to deal with the alienation of the actor from himself.

Playwrights like Pirandello, Brecht and Genet, have in different ways suggested new ways of seeing the relationship of the actor to his role. The very emergence of the director as a viable theatrical profession in and of itself in the last one hundred years seems to me at least in part a kind of bridge building across the gap between the actor and the playwright. It is with the help of a director that a modern actor connects to his role and to the playwright's work as a whole. Great directors like Stanislavski and Grotowski have delved deeply into the very nature of acting and of theatre itself, and each in his own way has suggested a new psychology of acting to revolutionize the theatre. But both of these directors were still committed to the rendition of conserved productions, and as such can be seen merely as *approaches* to a dissolution of the alienation of the actor from himself. In the prophetic visionary diatribes of Antonin Artaud, the conserve and the dying corruption of the theatre and of society in general was powerfully exposed; but alternate approaches were only vaguely suggested. In America, most notably in the work of The Open Theatre and of The Living Theatre among others, both prime examples of companies influenced powerfully by Stanislavski, Grotowski, Pirandello, Brecht, Genet and Artaud, the realization of a vibrant theatre for the actor and his audience has been attempted. But as will be demonstrated in the following sections, it is only in the writings of J. L. Moreno, in his *Theatre of Spontaneity*, and in psychodrama that the actor has finally been reunited with himself and liberated from subservience to the conserve of the playwright.

CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

There is no need to elaborate on the greatness of this man or on his influence on the modern theatre. Every actor and director, since the import of Stanislavski's ideas from Moscow to the English speaking world in the 1930s, has taken the essential principles of his psychology of acting (or a watered down derivation of them) as part of his elementary training, and our whole critical sense of whether or not an actor or a production is believable stems from Stanislavski's particular influence on theatrical sensibility. It is not within the scope of this paper to undertake an elaborate analysis of his methodology but merely to point out the general way in which he, as an influence on the contemporary theatre, is only an approach to a theatre of true spontaneity.

The following quote serves as an excellent summary of Stanislavski's most salient principles about acting:

> I follow the facts of the play. I take the actor as such. He places himself in the given circumstances of the role. He has to create a characteristic image. But he remains himself. Whenever he withdraws from himself, he kills the role. You live with your emotions. Remove the emotions and the role is

> dead. You must remain yourself in the image. If I walk around with a sick leg am I a different man? Am I different if bitten by a bee? These are external circumstances. . . .
>
> We are analyzing all the procedures, all the possibilities which take us to the threshold of the subconscious, which generate the subconscious reactions.[29]

Thus, Stanislavski developed a system of acting that called upon the actor to use himself, conscious and unconscious, the sum total of his experience and memories, in the service of the role and of the playwright. About the problem of revitalizing the written conserve he writes:

> They need the words not in order to memorize them by rote but to act them out. They put the words not on the muscles of their tongue, not even in the brain, but into the very soul whence the actor strives toward the super-objective.[30]

The problem with Stanislavski from a Morenian standpoint is that the element of spontaneity is here used to serve the cultural conserve, to revitalize *it*—and though the method is improvisation, the object is the conserve. Moreno levels two criticisms of Stanislavski in his Notes to *Theatre of Spontaneity*.[31] First, he likens Stanislavski to Freud in that both are concerned with "memories laden with affect." Rather than the moment, Stanislavski is concerned with evoking emotion through remembering, as Freud attempts to evoke abreaction for therapeutic purposes through the same mechanism. In Moreno's system Stanislavski's so-called magical "as-if" becomes the psychodramatic "is."

The second criticism is that in Stanislavski's system the actor is working in two contradictory dimensions. Thereby he is locked into irreconcilable conflict. The embryonic warming-up process of his improvisational work is only to be obliterated later on in the service of taking on a role "uncreated" by the actor, created by the playwright. Moreno's system allows for the complete spontaneity of the actor in-the-moment, in his own role.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

Artaud was, and through his posthumous influence on playwrights, directors, companies and whole schools of theatrical practitioners, continues to be, apocalyptic: vivid with complaint and celebration at the convulsive decay of old social orders. His discrediting of the writer and ongoing assault on the literary conserve, and throughout a revolutionary immediacy, animates Artaud's contribution to the theatre.

Artaud wrote verse, prose poems, film scripts, writings on cinema, painting and literature: essays, diatribes, and polemics on the theatre, several plays,

notes of a four part dramatic monologue for radio and assorted other fragments. What he bequeathed to us was not achieved works of art but a singular modern presence, a poetics, an aesthetics of thought and culture and, most importantly, a phenomenology of suffering. His vision of the act of writing was, in a sense, prophetic of the dénouement of modernism. Artaud conceived of writing as an unleashing, an unpredictable flow of searing energy; knowledge must explode in the reader's nerves. The details of Artaud's stylistics follow directly from his notion of consciousness as a morass of difficulty and suffering. He refused to see consciousness except as a process. He experienced and recorded this process character of consciousness in all its unseizability and flux.

In Moreno's terms, this notion of writing as the unleashing of an unpredictable energy is, in itself, both an attack on the conserve and a plaudit for spontaneity. Artaud was determined to crack the shell of "literature" and to violate the self protective distance between the reader and text. In his famous collection of essays entitled *The Theatre and Its Double*, he attacks the conserve directly in "No More Masterpieces"

> One of the reasons for the asphyxiating atmosphere in which we live without possible escape or remedy—and in which we all share even the most revolutionary among us—is our respect for what has been written, formulated or painted, what has been given form, as if all expression were not at last exhausted, were not at a point where things must break apart if they are to start anew and begin fresh.[32]

Artaud's assault here seems like a paraphrase of Moreno. He goes on to say how the literary conserve alienates the theatergoing public:

> If the public does not frequent our literary masterpieces, it is because those masterpieces are fixed; and fixed in forms that no longer respond to the needs of the time.

But before those needs can be justly met, Artaud declaims:

> We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and written poetry. Written poetry is worth reading once and then should be destroyed. Let the dead poets make way for others. Then we might come to see that it is our veneration of what has already been created, however beautiful and valid it may be, that petrifies us, deadens our responses and prevents us from making contact with the underlying power, the life force, the determinant of change, or anything you like. . . . Beneath the poetry of the texts, there is the actual poetry without form and without text.[33]

What a superb statement about the decay, the dessication of the conserve and the vitality of the moment, the validity of spontaneity to all creative endeavor! In 1926, Artaud announces in *The Theater and The Plague* that he

does not want to create a theater to present plays and so perpetuate or add to culture's list of consecrated masterpieces. He judges the heritage of written plays to be a useless obstacle and the playwright an unnecessary intermediary between the audience and the truth that can be presented, naked on a stage. Artaud imagines the theater as the place where the body would be reborn in thought and thought would be reborn in the body. He diagnoses his own disease as a split within his mind that internalizes the split between the mind and the body. Artaud's writings on the theater may be read as a psychological manual on the reunification of the mind and body. Theater became his supreme metaphor for the self-correcting, spontaneous, carnal, intelligent life of the mind.

The theater Artaud planned is a commando action against the established culture, an assault on the bourgeois public; it would both show people that they are dead and wake them up from their stupor. His diagnosis that we live in an "inorganic, petrified culture," and the lifelessness he associated with the dominance of the written word was hardly a fresh idea when he stated it, many decades later. Artaud has not exhausted his authority.

Artaud's connection to Nietzche has been often noted. Like Nietzche, Artaud conceived of himself as a physician to the culture—as well as one of its most painfully ill patients. Artaud's argument in *The Theatre and Its Double* is closely related to that of Nietzche who in *The Birth of Tragedy* lamented the shrivelling of the full-blooded archaic theatre of Athens by Socratic philosophy—by the introduction of a dialogue that reasons. Just as Nietzche harked back to the Dionysiac ceremonies that preceded the secularized, rationalized, verbal-dialogue theatre of Athens, Artaud found his models in non-Western religious or magical theater.

It is important to remember that what Artaud did on the stage as a director and as a leading actor in his own productions was too idiosyncratic, too narrow and hysterical to persuade. He had, rather, exerted influence through his ideas about the theater and a constituent part of the authority of these ideas remains precisely his inability to put them into practice. It is remarkable how much of Artaud becomes understandable after a reading of Moreno. But the major difference between the two is that Artaud managed only half-psychotic, tormented, poetic fragments. No less inspirational, are Moreno's highly systemized and well formulated theories and terminology; and Moreno provides us with a viable alternative and tool to combat the decay and corruption that Artaud so majestically proclaimed, in the theatre of spontaneity and in the psychodrama.

JERZY GROTOWSKI

Peter Brook, in a preface piece to *Towards a Poor Theatre*, discusses how, precisely, Grotowski is unique:

What did the work do?
It gave each actor a series of shocks.
The shock of confronting himself in the face of simple irrefutable challenges.
The shock of catching sights of his own evasions, tricks and clichés.
The shock of sensing something of his own vast and untapped resources.
The shock of being forced to question why he is an actor at all. . . .[34]

Grotowski's contribution to the art of acting devolves from his conception of the theater. His original contributions to the language of the theatre involve the notion of the "poor theater" and performance as an act of transgression. The idea of "poor theater" warrants some expansion.

> The elimination of stage-auditorium dichotomy is not the important thing that simply creates a bare laboratory situation, an appropriate area for investigation. The essential concern is finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements.[35]

Grotowski stripped away from the theater all the physical impedimenta which create "effect." He forsook lighting effects and substituted a wide use of stationary light-sources by deliberate work with shadows, bright spots, etc. Spectators are illuminated in Grotowski's theater so that they too become partners in the performance. In addition to the abandonment of lighting effects, Grotowski rejected make-up, fake noses and body effects of all kinds. The actor was directed, instead, to transform from type to type, from character to character, silhouette to silhouette—while the audience watched—in a "poor" manner: that is, using only his own body and craft. Elimination of plastic elements which have a life of their own (i.e., represent something independent of the actor's activities) led to the creation by the actor of the most elementary and obvious objects. Elimination of music enabled the performance itself to become music through the orchestration of voices and clashing objects (TPT, p. 22).

What is fascinating about Grotowski's notion of "poor theater" is the particular sense in which it too is merely an approach to a full scale assault on the conserve. The following quote from *Towards a Poor Theater* supports this speculation:

> We know that the text *per se* is not theater,
>
> . . . that it becomes theater only through the actors' use of it—that is to say, thanks to intonations, to the association of sounds, to the musicality of language.
>
> The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form.[36]

The assault on the text, of the literary conserve conventionally called the theater echoes Moreno and seconds Artaud. This concern with the "very nature of the art-form" leads Grotowski further.

> Why are we concerned with art? To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness–fulfill ourselves. This is not a condition but a process in which what is dark in us slowly becomes transparent. In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life-mask, the theatre, with its full-fledged perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation. . . .
>
> It is capable of challenging itself and its audience by violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling and judgement–more jarring because it is imaged in the human organism's breath, body and inner impulses. This defiance of taboo, this transgression, provides the shock which rips off the mask, enabling us to give ourselves nakedly to something which is impossible to define but which contains *Eros and Caritas.*[37]

But it would be incorrect, however, to connect Grotowski to the notion of the conserve and spontaneity without making some careful distinctions. It is true that his discussion of the exploding of masks and his notion of process in the discovery of theatre echoes the Morenian concept of spontaneity/creativity. In addition, Grotowski's commitment to a fundamentally anti-bourgeois theater and his violent rejection of the stereotypic in the training of actors corresponds to the values Moreno propounds in *Theatre of Spontaneity*. However, the actual productions of the *Poor Theatre* rely on brilliant, spontaneous impulses of the directorial imagination, while constricting the actors to the most rigid, preordained *coda* of response.

Understanding Grotowski requires an acknowledgment of his religious roots. His thought and his imagination depend heavily on the Polish experience of the Eastern Orthodox Church and its reliance on the evocative power of intricate and long ceremonies, laden with symbolism. The ascetic quality, the monastic rigor, the choreographed discipline of the Polish Lab Theatre actors training reflects and rarifies Grotowski's tie to the Church. His actors involve themselves in an almost Jesuitical *ascesis* with bodily mortification. The process in which the actors involve themselves has the flavor of a spiritual quest: the rigor and energy of the self exploration, the psychic penetration is modeled on the voyage the Christian mystic takes. What is so astounding is that Grotowski's theatre as theatre, in my opinion, fails. American audience members characteristically complained of boredom while witnessing the actual productions. What is most startling in the Polish Lab Theater productions is the total absence of spontaneity on the part of the actors. What we see when we watch is a highly stylized, intellectual, starkly ritualized choreography without surprises: almost like an eastern European Kabuki theater, esoteric and remote.

In summation, I would reiterate that I agree with Peter Brook's *kudos* to the contributions Grotowski has made to the art of acting. No theatre has made such profound demands on its actors; few actors have such massive commitment to their art. But the whole effort, the process *Towards a Poor Theatre*, fails to capture the improvisational and spontaneous life within the actors themselves and thereby serves the ends of the conserve, a functionary by default to an institution it proclaims to reject.

CHAIKIN'S OPEN THEATRE

Joe Chaikin's now defunct Open Theatre, producers of *America Hurrah, Viet Rock, The Serpent, Terminal*, among others, was probably the most exciting exponent of the "ensemble" method of theatrical production the world of modern theatre has known. Though improvisation was the mode of preparation for all aspects of the finished product, there was just that at the end: a finished product. All streams of spontaneity lead to the conserve. In other words, the audience ultimately witnessed as predetermined an entity as one would expect to see on Broadway. Every line, gesture, entrance and exit was fixed by the script and the directorial production book. It is to their credit that both the playwright and the director as discrete functions were taken over by the group; that all decisions came out of a *communal* consciousness, *communal* taste, a *communal* sensibility, a *communal* process.

The political innovations of Chaikin's theatre—both for the theatre itself and as contained within the plays produced for society in general—have to do with this remarkable emphasis on ensemble. This mode of preparation is a welcome antidote to the overspecialization, fragmentation and totalitarian aspects of theatrical production as we know it. One way to understand how this was achieved is that Chaikin and his people rejected economic dependency on the marketplace and on its timetable and standards. His actors moonlighted as everything from teachers to gas station attendants. The payoff was a luxuriously long development for the ensemble and for each piece.

It is during this development period that The Open Theatre most closely approached the Morenian ideal of spontaneity theatre. I myself witnessed a few of Chaikin's closed "rehearsals" six months into the development of a piece which took over a year and a half to "perfect" and ultimately conserve into the play known as *The Serpent*. Those rehearsals rank with the most exciting *moments* I have spent in the theatre. The tragedy is that Chaikin was tied to the conserve. Those closed rehearsals were gems of theatre. So in tune was the ensemble—director, players, spectators were so entranced and unabashedly basking in the heat of spontaneous production—that in many ways the precepts of Moreno's theatre of spontaneity were fulfilled. I only now understand why I immediately recognized Chaikin and his Open Theatre ensemble as a pioneering venture of immense magnitude on the American theatrical

scene when I attended those rehearsals in the second story loft of that dimly lit warehouse on the lower east side of New York City. I can account for why I was curiously disappointed by the well polished "performance" of *The Serpent* over a year later at the plush Loeb Drama Center of Harvard University. In the loft experience I was witnessing the ensemble in the status nascendi of spontaneity-creativity. In the Loeb, I was watching an impressive example of the cultural conserve.

THE BECKS' LIVING THEATRE

It comes as no surprise that Joe Chaikin was formerly a member of the Living Theatre in the early days. While in New York, Judith Malina and her husband Julian Beck directed their Living Theatre through a long and exciting evolution. It was during their metamorphoses into an anarchistic-mystical band of nomads and as their journeys around the world began, that Chaikin deserted Judith and Julian's troupe to set up his own theatre. Quintessentially more radical than Chaikin's ensemble, the controversial Becks represent one of the most fascinating if troubling movements in the present-day theatre. The idea of "ensemble" that we saw in Chaikin's group is here on a higher plane: economically, philosophically and politically, the band of actors try to live out the anarchism that they proselytize in their work and in their own lives. Once again, one can observe an approach to Moreno's ideas, but still another ultimate failure to achieve a theatre of true spontaneity.

I had a chance to experience the major productions of their repertoire in 1969. It consisted of *Mysteries*—a compendium of personal vignettes, each related to a member of the company, and *Frankenstein*—a rather elaborate, interesting if overlong and grandiose production. Both these shows were cultural conserves in every sense of the word and warrant no further attention here. But the third production—according to the Becks when I saw it, the most complete expression and realization of themselves as artists and people at that time—was called *Paradise Now* and is indeed relevant to our discussion. Formally, this production claimed to be a radical departure from theatrical tradition. It is true that the division between "stage" and "house" was eliminated even when the piece was performed in the most old fashioned of proscenium theatres.* Actors were completely at home interacting directly

*This is not original: we find several places where Moreno clearly demanded similar changes in spacial arrangements fifty years ago. For example:

> . . . all events on the stage should be clearly visible from every part of the audience . . . the actor had no escape to turn to, no curtain in front and no backstage, he was thrown into space and had to act there. The emphasis was therefore on spontaneity, on the warming up, and the movement on the stage. Everything which occurred previously backstage now occurred before the eyes of the public.[16]

and spacially within the audience, and the audience was successfully encouraged to join the main part of the action on the stage, behind the proscenium arch. *Paradise Now* certainly was one of the more dramatic attempts to break down the barriers between audience and performer. Spectators were invited—and some accepted the invitations—to join the actors in taking off their clothes, to join them in the body pile, to burn their money and draft cards, to bring the show out into the streets at the end, and ultimately to form anarchist cells and begin the revolution in their home town! The Living Theatre was concerned with revitalizing the conserves of mystical philosophy (e.g., the *Kabbalah*, the Vedanta Scriptures, the *I Ching*), and in revolutionizing social forms, beginning with the theatre. They were nominally out to incite the overthrow of what they saw as our fascistic, repressive social order (psychologically as well as sociologically) and were devoted to making their theatre an act of provocation and sacrifice.

Paradise Now did succeed all four times that I saw it in evoking and including impromptu additions from the audience into the fabric of the event. Related to this was the remarkable extent to which members of the audience were warmed up by the fanatical fervor of the troupe. But there were at least three crucial ways in which *Paradise Now* fell short of Morenian principles.

In the first place, the piece was, in fact, a completely set and predetermined series of actions to be performed by the actors. At the core what we find is a scenario—a kind of outline for a contemporary, mystical-political Commedia dell' Arte. And as with the classical Commedia, the actors were free to improvise, *around the basic conserved superstructure*, and only from a reservoir of stock embellishments. Moreno has repeatedly demonstrated how the theatre of spontaneity is an advance over and a radical departure from the Commedia.

What *was* closer to a true notion of spontaneity was the way in which the audience was brought into the action. The warm-up of the audience during the performance and the consequent interaction was like an emotional tornado. Enraged or enraptured, the audience members were moved to a frenzied pitch of energy matching that of the troupe. There were feelings of danger, of sacrilege, of frenzy, of chaos. Moreno defines spontaneity as "the variable degree of adequate response to a situation of a variable degree of novelty."[17] He outlines three types of spontaneity:

1. Whenever a *novel* response occurs without adequacy, that is undisciplined or pathological spontaneity.
2. Whenever an *adequate* response occurs without significant characteristics of novelty and creativity.
3. Whenever an adequate response occurs *with* characteristics of novelty and creativity.[18]

The key to why much of the spontaneity that was elicited during the performance was of the first type, i.e., pathological, rather than of the third much more desirable type, lies in the distinction Moreno makes elsewhere between two kinds of warm-up:

> (a) *Undirected warming-up*, individual or group—vague, chaotic, confused, moving towards several goals on several tracks simultaneously. (b) *Directed warming-up*, individual or group —moving without any deviation clearly and powerfully towards a creative act, its exclusive, specific goal.[19]

"The warm-up process is the operational manifestation of spontaneity,"[20] Moreno tells us. Clearly what occurred in the audience of *Paradise Now* was the undirected warm-up manifesting itself for the most part in pathological spontaneity. Though a champion of spontaneity and creativity, Moreno is well aware of the necessity of form, limits and boundaries: in short, for a discipline within which spontaneity can be trained to not only be novel but adequate as well.

Finally, the content of *Paradise Now* essentially encourages the audience to join the anarchist revolution. One consequence of this rather naive position is to clearly divide the spectators into "us" and "them." The "them" group becomes further alienated, frightened and angry, while the "us" group is rallied to a higher pitch of excitement if not commitment to the causes espoused. The Living Theatre admits that polarization is part of their purpose; that the sooner polarization between the reactionary and radical forces in our society occurs, the sooner will come the revolution. Moreno's radicalism is fundamentally different and is in fact a revolutionary way of being a revolutionary.

Moreno is essentially a proponent of the revolution of the psyche, and sees that as prerequisite to any basic reordering of society. The theatre of pure spontaneity and certainly psychodrama contain the machinery for revolutionizing its participants through spontaneity training. The point then is not to alienate, but to invite all members of the audience to participate in its own actualization in the *moment*. His new appraisal of our system of values comes out of a particular emphasis upon the survival of man, not as an animal, but as a creative agent.[21] His objective is to save us from the threat of the "masterful development and distribution" of cultural conserves which have reached such a point of masterful development in our time that they pose a threat to the inherent sensitivity of our creative patterns.[22] And as we have seen before, it is not at all in the content of a theatrical piece that Moreno sees the power to radicalize the public, but in the mode of creation. Here the genius of Moreno becomes truly visible. In psychodrama and the theatre of spontaneity, Moreno gives us a revolution for the soul: the Creative Revolution.

A THEATRE FOR OUR TIME: THEATRE FOR SPONTANEOUS RITUAL

A theatre for our time is a theatre of spontaneity. A theatre for our time must fill the void where there is no living ritual to take us back to ourselves, our families, our culture, our society, our history, our god. The church and its rites are conserves. The traditional theatre is at its best a stunning revitalization of a conserve. The new movements in the theatre, though they suggest an approach to a theatre of spontaneity, fall short of the ideal. My own feeling is that the body of Moreno's work contains all the ingredients for such a theatre. But as he noted in the Introduction to his *Theatre of Spontaneity*, the "enormous difficulties" he was faced with were the audiences, who were toally unprepared for any but the conventional conserve based enterprise. He concluded that before such a theatre could succeed, it would involve the "enormous task of changing the attitude of the public. This would require a total revolution of our culture, a creative revolution."[2 3] My own suggestion in this direction is fairly modest. I find the prospects of facing an audience in the conventional time slot allotted to a piece of theatre—particularly when the project is a theatre of pure spontaneity—overwhelming. The very idea of training an ensemble in theatrical spontaneity, even if the actors were intially amenable to such an idea and talented in that regard, is less interesting to me than beginning with the model that I am most familiar with, in terms of Moreno's work—the psychodrama encounter group. It is in these where I find the locus nascendi for my conception. Since I left the traditional theatre, and for the last six years, I have run over thirty psychodrama encounter groups of various designs. The most advantageous composition has seemed to be about fourteen members, directed by myself and my wife (also a trained psychodramatist). Of all the designs we have attempted, the Ten Day Live-In Group has seemed to be the most exciting. It lasts for ten consecutive days, at an isolated retreat away from our urban centers, in the country. It is in these groups that I perceive a handle, a beginning for this project. Let me explain myself.

After about the fourth day, it is almost as if we all take off—for some other place. What I mean to say is that we all begin, very naturally, to move to another level of consciousness. It seems part of an organic consequence of the psychodramatic experience. I am sure that this experience is common to all successful psychodramatists—even after a single powerful session—and to any successful group psychotherapist. The explanation seems clear; the motive force that is carrying us beyond our usual predictable selves to another "way" of being, is that of spontaneity. We begin to be-in-the-moment. But since the nominal reason for such a group is therapy, in the clinical sense of that word, not much is done, formally that is, with that energy, other than to note it with a kind of mystified, exhilarated amazement and go on to the clinical business at hand with renewed energy.

This dramatic change in the spontaneity of the community of the group—it usually effects everyone to a man, although there is the occasional problem of a sociometric isolate—has always fascinated me. I have often asked myself the question: what to do with it? Where does it lead? What if this were not a *therapy* group in the narrow sense; if I were free from the conserve of what I and my clients consider to be our job; what then would I do? What if I were to trust the adventure that this released spontaneity is prompting me to? Images come to me. Three stages. One stage is for the psychodramatic: the nuclear family, the significant others, the key collectives of the social atom surrounding the protagonist, the troubles inside; the places intrapsychically and interpersonally where he feels blocked from his own spontaneity and creativity. The second stage is for the culture as a whole, society as a whole, mankind as a whole. The roles are different here, although the protagonists are the same. Here, prepared by the spontaneity that was released on the psychodramatic stage, the protagonist is ready to take on Joan of Arc or Antigone or Napoleon: mythic roles; also roles out of the recent past and present: Richard Nixon, a dying North Vietnamese, a brutal Nazi, a lynched black man. Here the protagonist faces the places in his humanity that are troubled, blocked up, blind, bound. Here he takes on, in action, on the stage, the sins of his species. For I maintain that we *all* carry those nightmares somewhere within us; and clean though we will our psyches of familial issues, the corruption of *Man* is toxic to us all. And that until we face the myths within us and the corruption around us, we needs must be asleep. And finally, the third stage: this is veiled for me; the most mysterious of all. Here is the cosmic level, the religious, the mingling with the Source, beyond man, beyond death, beyond Good and Evil ... here is the contemplation of infinite spontaneity and creativity.

Let me quote J. L. Moreno:

> Creativity is *the* problem of the universe; it is therefore *the* problem of all existence, the problem of every religion, science, the problem of psychology, sociometry and human relations.[24]

Moreno is a profoundly religious man. The source of his great works is spiritual. He tells us in the conclusion of this same article:

> My existential authority to discuss the process of creativity on the highest level derives from an adventurous life which I have led, preceding the First World War. It took me at the end of it to a castle near Vienna where I spent several years in meditation. The experiences which I had I tried to put into words in a book which has become known as *Das Testament des Vaters* (1920) in which the idea of the I-Creator and the principle of creativity were proclaimed as the first principles of the universe. All I know about these elusive things and all I have done on the experimental level since stems from these days.[25]

If there is still any doubt about Moreno's essential religiosity, one need only remember these lines from the Introduction to his *Theatre of Spontaneity*:

> . . . I chose the course of the theatre instead of founding a religious sect, joining a monastery or developing a system of theology (although they do not exclude each other) . . . The idee fixe became my constant source of productivity; it proclaimed that there is a sort of primordial nature which is immortal and returns afresh with every generation, a first universe which contains all beings and in which all events are sacred. I liked that enchanting realm and did not plan to leave it, ever.[26]

And, to put it as simply as possible, he writes in *Psychodrama, Volume I*, "The highest value of spontaneity and creativity, the top value on any axiological scale, is a totally spontaneous-creative being, the Godhead."

I feel then that I am in good company when I say that I consider my own affinity for both the theatre and therapy religious in origin. For me, the objective of a religious rite, a theatrical event and a group psychotherapy session are not dissimilar. A group of human beings come together to participate in an event circumscribed by certain agreed upon conventions. They come to heal themselves and one another, to connect with their existential roots. They are seeking meaning, commonality, redemption, the source, Godhead. It is my intention, in closing, to suggest some guidelines for bringing psychodrama and the principles of spontaneity and creativity back to their religious origin.

I see a group of between six and twenty persons of diverse background, with one thing in common. The idea of going off to the country to explore this theatre of spontaneous ritual is attractive to them. It would be clear to them at the outset, that although this experience would resemble and in many ways at times be like a therapy group, the other purpose would be to explore our social and mythic past, our relationship to our culture, to society and to our species in general, and ultimately to consider our relationship to God. They would know that this was a new venture; that for its success we were all mutually dependent on one another for support, imagination, honesty, and above all, the courage to be. It would be clear that we were leaving—to the best of our conditioned abilities—the conserves of ritual, of religion, of theatre, of therapy in the city, at home. That in the place where we were going we were going to start from scratch. With only the basic instruments of psychodrama at our disposal (the director, the stage, the protagonist, the auxiliary egos, the audience[28]), we were all to be creators and explorers of the natural progression from the self to the Source. From the I to Thou as I-As-God and Thou-As-God. That we did not exactly know where we were going, and that we did not know if we would share our memories and discoveries of the unfolding of our communal journey when we returned—out of the magic circle and back to the familiar world—until the experience was

ended. That I would begin as the director and guide, but that in time we would aim for not just a democracy, but a "creatocracy"[29] for our theatre of spontaneous ritual. That in time we would all share the leadership; that we would all be co-directors and co-guides. Whether there would be three discrete, separate stages or spaces or simply one would make less difference than that it would be clear to all of us that all three planes of experience, the psychodramatic, the mytho-socio-historio-dramatic, and the cosmodramatic be served. That our ultimate goal was to pass on to that place, if only for a glance, beyond good and evil, beyond the conserve, beyond our own lives; to that immortal plane of infinite spontaneity and creativity, "a first universe which contains all beings and in which all events are sacred."

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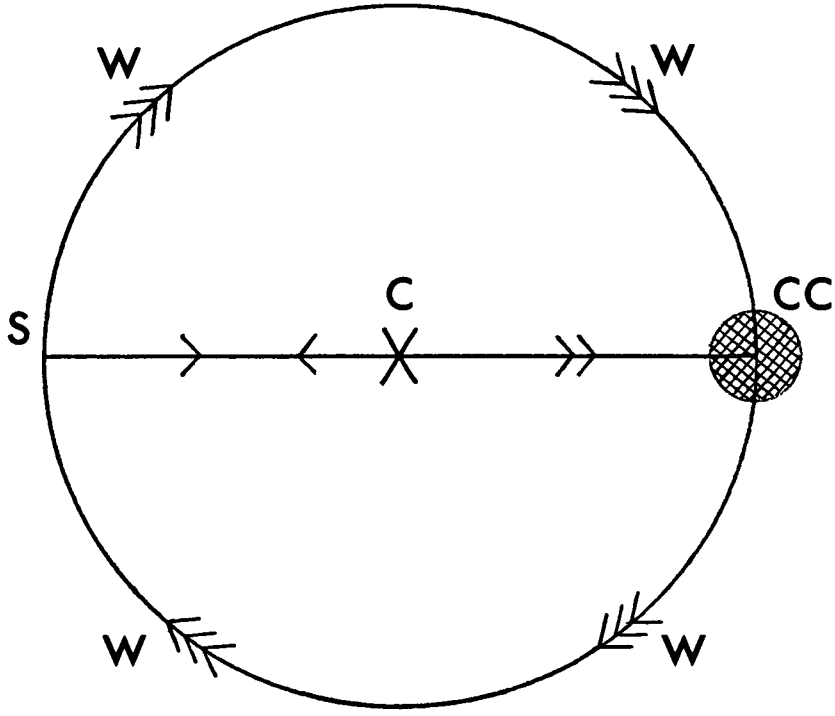
APPENDIX

CANON OF CREATIVITY
Spontaneity–Creativity–Conserve



Field of Rotating Operations Between Spontaneity–Creativity–Cultural Conserve (S-C-CC)

S–Spontaneity, C–Creativity, CC–Cultural (or any) Conserve (for instance, a biological conserve, *i.e.*, an animal organism, or a cultural conserve, *i.e.*, a book, a motion picture, or a robot, *i.e.*, a calculating machine); W–Warming up is the "operational" expression of spontaneity. The circle represents the field of operations between S, C and CC.

Operation I: Spontaneity arouses Creativity, C. S—> C.

Operation II: Creativity is receptive to Spontaneity. S <—C.

Operation III: From their interaction Cultural Conserves, CC, result. S—> C—>> CC.

Operation IV: Conserves (CC) would accumulate indefinitely and remain "in cold storage." They need to be reborn, the catalyzer Spontaneity revitalizes them. CC—>>> S—>>> CC.

S does not operate in a vacuum, it moves either towards Creativity or towards Conserves.

Total Operation

Spontaneity-creativity-warming up act$<^{\text{actor}}_{\text{conserve}}$

From Moreno, J. L. "Who Shall Survive?" 2nd Edition, 1953, page 46.

FANTASY

A group of men and women, of different ages and backgrounds, retreat together to a place away from their usual living space. A guide is at their head. They are embarking on a journey. Into themselves, into each other: and through each other they will face all men: and through all men they will face God: and through God they will face the God within themselves and in all beings and in all things.

Three rungs; three stages; three spaces.
The psychodramatic; the sociatric; the cosmic.
Action on any rung feeds action on the other two.

In the morning the director outlines the three places of action. He conducts a group exercise to intensify each protagonist's warm-up. Each member is brought closer to the emergent production within him, on the appropriate stage or stages. In the afternoon, on the psychodramatic stage, a young man confronts his mother when he was three; he is there again, but this time more there than then; he weeps and rages, then weeps again, more fully this time. He forgives himself. In the evening a young woman takes the role of Eve; for all the women in the group she confronts and role reverses with God and Adam. Joined by a chorus of women she rewrites the book of Genesis in action. At midnight the chanting of mantras begins; later a slow winding dance, low humming. The group watches the sun rise in silence.