



## Collaborative Text Development for Non Text-Based Theatre

How do we experience the tension in the interstices of these desires - to be an artist, to be a reflective thinker, to perform, to write? Why is it that the analysts who attract me the most, Jung obviously, and Freud too, wanted to be artists or at least perceived as artists? "I have at last achieved my aim to be a man of science, but perceived as an artist..." Well, I wouldn't go precisely that route (no need to be seen as a man of science!) but I do want to see from an artistic point of view - and one that is embodied.

The nature of the work I get to do with the Archipelago Theatre Company is intuitive, imaginal (nothing new here), and collaborative (new for me), inspired by issues that crowd the heart, affect our body's movement and alter the breath. Ellen Hemphill (Archipelago's artistic director) and I, function like thieves in the night using dream plunder. And thieves in the day after the example of Martha Graham who claimed it was all hers for the taking - text from her elders as well as her peers, the movements of a bird, a lighting technique from a dance theatre downtown. Yet the "authors" of such plundered work wouldn't recognise them-selves as thieves because new pieces are always original. Each play comes, as Hemphill says, "from the netherlands" much like a dream, offering its unique and

unpredictable burst of images trailing distorted bits of a familiar world.

We both have backgrounds in psychology and the philosophy of religion. We are both intense observers. Getting to cast characters after twenty-five years of working with psyches is a joy, and would be a natural for many psychotherapists. Archetypal psychology, especially, knows that it takes an artist to perceive the uniqueness in another human being. When James Hillman writes about the process of perceiving persons

as images I know that he has his own artists in mind<sup>1</sup> including the imagist poets Pound and H.D. whom I also love, but I think the most illuminating artistic examples of his way of reading people are found in theatre work. Theatres like Pantheatre and Archipelago whose directors (Pardo and Hemphill) both see their quite different work as

"choreographic-grounded" (if you can use such a metaphor for movement theatre, "grounded" as at the still point of turning worlds) in gestures, words and sound.

I have often said that my first experience of watching Enrique Pardo's master class was like seeing the best therapy ever performed... though now I know that he and others in the Roy Hart Theatre tradition would cringe at the wrong kind of therapy analogy - it is about how carefully his work does its seeing and how closely he attends the actor's every move. It is precisely the kind of attention we mean to live by as archetypal psychologists but often don't because of the "gradual glaucoma of psychology". Hillman mentions a study that shows psychologists tend to be the worst perceivers of the person in front of them: "there is clear evidence that good ability (to discern the character of others) is related to painting and dramatic avocations.

... The ability to rate traits accurately and to predict responses correlates positively with simple, traditional, artistic sensitivity."

Ellen starts with her actors "first by hearing the voices. Hearing them with the neutral medium of the piano. I learn a lot quickly from this and watching their bodies. I also watch

how people walk and talk and sigh, and listen." And so it took watching theatre work for me to see how I do therapy. It wasn't until after attending my first acting

workshop and starting to write *Scenes from Therapy* - in which I was trying to capture moments of what transpires between us in the consulting room - that I could see my own concentrated attentiveness to the body and its moves. Prior to that, if you had asked me, I would have said I worked through the ear, paying attention to words.

Now I have participated in eight of Pantheatre's Myth and Theatre Festivals and collaborated in the production of four plays with Archipelago. When I asked these theatre colleagues to tell me about what they read in the time they were fostering their own theatrical styles, they gave me lists topped by archetypal psychology. They were reading us and we were reading them. Well, sort of; many of us found inspiration for our best work not in reading other psychologists, but in reading poetry, for example, or looking at art and performance.

*I tend to flee if I see archetypes in a programme.*

Enrique Pardo

How do theatre and archetypal psychology actually work together... in the immediate context of how Ellen and I arrive at a production? Even though I am a writer, it is not crafted language I provide to the play writing process as much as an imagination based on familiarity with this kind of psychology, years of dream work, and knowledge of mythology. I can tell stories of characters and stories of character behind characters. Sometimes furnished by myth and sometimes by folklore, I know the imaginal demographics - what a character's dwelling place is like, what sort of food they prefer. I can discern facets of their shadows, name their children, describe their births, expose

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1. *Eranos Lectures 4, Egalitarian Typologies versus the Perception of the Unique*. Spring Publications, Dallas Texas, 1980. See sections ii and iii on persons as faces and persons as images. James Hillman is the bad-boy of Jungian psychology and the father of archetypal psychology. All Hillman references are from this source. His re-visioning ideas lend themselves beautifully to a drama-based theory of persons as gestures.

their scandals and imagine how they might interact with friends. I have an inkling about how they treat animals and can pick out their voices as well as their style in a crowd.

Sometimes it is a direct dive into myth's pool that constitutes initial research for these theatre pieces, as was the case with our first collaboration *Those Women*; sometimes it is a specific study of far-flung archetypal imagery. Not roving the planet "for resemblances which neglect the specifics of the actual image" (a Hillman warning), but fanning out from here where we are interested in mud, for example, to look at any of mud's manifestations in poetry, novels and on the path down to the lake... It is like the process the Dutch architect Koolhaas says he goes through when planning a new design, visiting eighty libraries to see how each is specifically conceived, gathering realised images into the process of conceiving his own.

*Those Women* required revisiting the realm of Dionysian mythology. *Eulogy for a Warrior* led to the arena of Mars, reading war novels, talking to veterans, studying the Smithsonian Vietnam memorial artefact collection, reading journalists' accounts and soldiers' letters. Our third piece set in a seedy Italian circus, *Amor Fortuna*, required getting into Aphrodite's cache of Victorian valentines with their intricate imagery. And

*Snow*, our most recent collaboration, required reading Thomas Mann, learning about ornithology and getting a feel for snow

- how it tastes (or doesn't), how bodies move in it, its many faces.

So the first stage of "writing" is reading - the things I have mentioned, plus other miscellaneous non-fiction works and possibly other plays. It lasts for about six months and begins immediately on the heels of the former production. Artistic directors tend to be visited by an image that seeds the next production in very fraught moments, like

driving home from an opening night that had more loose ends than finished... This part of the process echoes Charles Olson's declaration about poetry - how "each moment follows instanter on another".

*The first thing is the idea... I have a thought, or feel a need to express something, some aspect of the human condition, or some person's perspective in history, and then the dream begins. It may be a woman with an empty bowl trying to fill it with water (Those Women), ... or seeing in my minds-eye two men and a woman in black coats falling backwards in a snow bank to create snow angels (Snow). It all comes from the netherlands of my mind/soul. I do take written texts (The Abdication, Pinter, The Crucible), but in the last years have focused on the writing myself or with Nor Hall. We seem to have an osmosis of thought in our communication that winds its way to the stage.*

Ellen Hemphill

We accumulate a random pile of readings connected only by the mention of words like *mud* or *snow* or *Eros*. She begins immediately to assemble musicians, set and lighting designers and actors according to her sense of the shape of the play and its needs, without having any idea about text. I have noticed Rilke, Yourcenar, Japanese novelists often among her initial inspirators. She likes films and watches television for a kind of distraction that becomes information.

We like *haiku* for its savouring of colour, and dreams - well, dreams we like for many reasons. No dream fundamentalists, we have fragmented dreams for the gem of an image, made dreams up out of other dreams, found them in autobiographies, and incubated dreams for a purpose.

My influences are more predictably classicists, poets, etymology, Jungian writers, and archetypal psychologists. In our programmes

you will always (so far) find Hillman thanked for an unwitting contribution - most recently for the article on Family published about twenty years ago in the *Texas Monthly* which we used in our thinking about the relationships between four grown siblings in *Snow*.

Our sources for writing attract other sources indiscriminately, or does this happen unconsciously? Material materialises from the newspaper, talk shows, airline magazines as well as from Plutarch, Freud, or Anne Carson. During this research phase, as the montage of material mounts, Ellen and I are in regular phone and email contact discussing the lives of our children, family events - the accidents and ecstasies, the heck of life detail adding it all (as in *Finnegan's Wake*) to the midden heap where we (the biddies) hunt and peck the details of the piece.

After the reading comes the writing. Ordinarily the writing phase of anything for me requires *absolute solitude*. But in this work preparing for what Pardo called that "virtuosic dramaturgical juggling with ideas, words, gestures drawn into the vortex of performance" it is communication that is required. Two things occur at this point: first Ellen schedules a research weekend with the cast that I attend. These weekends have included voice and movement workshops, a dream incubation retreat, an initiation discussion group. In this

context Ellen does initial body research with the actors and begins to elicit gestures from their normal ways of being. Then, with this crucial data and the notions sparked by the intensity of such work, we schedule a long weekend away somewhere far from our Minnesota and North Carolina homes; somewhere with access to nature, like the New Mexican desert or the coast of New England. The collaboration with the essential image of the piece has already widened (beyond us) to include the proprioceptive data of the actors' material, and now even further, it widens to include the environment. These wild places and the vastness they let on to unlock a floodgate in Ellen's directorial imagination and she starts the process of developing the play that has been conceived. I take notes. We ask each other questions. What transpires between us is something like heat lightning flashes over concurrent tracks of active imagination. We sit in chairs for hours surrounded by books, computers, getting these flash illuminations, articulating specific images that have been quietly gestating for months, and typing - lines for an opening dialogue or a list of characters and their subtler qualities.

Archipelago pieces are always ninety minutes long or less; an intense stretch of performance unbroken by intermission. Movement, vocalisation (in sound or music), and text are players of like proportion. There tends to be a story line *of sorts* - but it is not linear and it cannot stand alone in a read-through. For example, in *Those Women*, five women in our mothers' generation (the 1950s) gathered every week for a bridge game (the story), a question hovers in the air about whether or not each one will dare to go through a transformation that will break her out of the conflict/ confines of her particular pathology. The story evolves (as anyone's story evolves) in the characters' moves, songs, actions, vocal ejaculations and interaction and only sometimes gets furthered by spoken words.

When the rehearsal period starts, only about five weeks before the opening night, there is no script for the actors. We have nearly finished the text by then, but the actor's work begins in the body by expanding the specific gestural vocabulary that began months earlier in the initial weekend together. Bringing the text in a few days later underscores our aim - of keeping the characters alive. In the writing process we have tried to resonate our sources the way an artist does (and the way an archetypal dream worker does), not by illustrating, interpreting,

or commenting on images, but by amplifying them with associations, or carrying an image on - extending its range into a soundscape or a physical move for example. If an actor resonates her way into a character this way through embodied sound and gesture, the words of the text, when they arrive, seem to emanate less from the ego and more from the psyche. Then it seems possible to tell whether or not the text as it is written "makes sense". At this stage new words will sometimes come spontaneously from the actors, or from Ellen who can suddenly hear another way of conveying the piece's intent. Song words (written by the composer with our contribution - another story, another level of the collaboration) are woven in during the rehearsal process.

In the final fabric of each play the word order is as fixed as the musical score and the choreographed movement. On the opening night when I have flown from the Twin Cities to North Carolina to see the play for the first time I recognise some of the words, but the transformation of my writing is as complete as the transformation of genetic material that goes into the making of a child; and as impossible to separate out. Which is why when people ask to see "the script", in order to read what I have been writing lately, I have to say, sorry, you won't find it there. It is a thread, substantial, but come and gone, grown into full-expression of itself, acted out and vanished into the shimmering vortex of performance.

event 2000 she spoke on behalf of Gossip and the art of talking between women. Currently she is working on the fifth production with Archipelago Theatre company in Chapel Hill, North Carolina: *A New Fine Shame: On the Life and Loves of Lou Andreas-Salome*.