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*Franc Chamberlain, Carl Lavery, Ralph Yarrow**

STEPS TOWARDS AN ECOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE**

Keywords: *performance; ecology; bodies; practices; nature; affect; theory*

Abstract: *Our aim in constructing our keynote events was to present a spectrum of approaches to the conjunction of performance and ecology, to give some account of what has been done in writing and in practice. We also wanted to demonstrate in our methodology some of the dynamics of the conjunction; to raise some questions both about the 'ecology' of a 'performance' in a group setting and to suggest some topics for further speculation.*

Since we adopted an interactive approach, picking up approaches and points for discussion from each other and moving, physically and metaphorically, around the space, we cannot completely reproduce the process and directionality of that event in writing. Instead, we offer a set of notes and topics, written individually by each of us but woven together in what seems like a useful sequence, but which is not, either in its sequence or in the exact words, a replica of what occurred in the session. We will cover much if not all of what we tried to raise there, and there may be occasional additions.

We start to think about the complexity of what might constitute an ecology of the theatre. Although we do not ignore text, we focus principally on the nature of performance training and practice and the kinds of 'ecological' knowledge which can be identified here, the relationship between performance and site/location/environment, and the ways in which thinking about theatre and performance as an ecology problematises what goes on. We question the nature/culture binary which would keep the two separate, and we've tried to come up with different ways of addressing that. We also challenge the idea that human beings, and by extension theatre, are in some way separate from nature and the animal.

The contemporary battleground over words like 'nature' and 'environment' is more than a matter of mere semantics, but a leading edge of political conflict, albeit in the realm of ideology where 'we become conscious of political matters and fight them out'. The fight arises precisely because words like 'nature' and 'environment' convey a commonality and universality of concern that is, precisely because of their ambiguity, open to a great diversity of interpretation (Harvey 2).

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Theatre and ecology – what’s in a name?

Carl Lavery

As I understand it – and I could of course be wrong – the purpose behind this tripartite address is to avoid the temptations of dialectics, a mode of thought that we might see as implicitly theological in its commitment to trinitarianism, and instead to create a meandering or rhizomatic text that would weave, swerve, make unexpected connections, seek oblique alignments – a text, a performance, then, that does not advance its ecological thought in terms of reasoned arguments and well-defined concepts. Rather, this paper is a paper that asks you to lend an ear, to find your place within it, to allow for reverberation and resonance; to make it matter, to assemble it as you will, as you can, to respond to it as a type of machine, an assemblage. There will be pauses, gaps, disagreements, speculations, witness accounts, reports from the field, flights of theoretical fancy, moments of consensus and moments of dissensus. Things might get messy. We might overshoot the mark, and in doing so take the risk of falling into chaos. But let’s not worry too much about that, for chaos, too, can be generative.

We come here as theatre and performance theorists and practitioners, not as literary scholars. With respect to the themes of this conference, this has benefits and drawbacks, or rather to be a little more complex, its drawbacks are its benefits. Unlike the disciplines of literature and philosophy, with their respective sub-disciplines of eco-criticism and ecosophy, theatre scholars have paid relatively little attention to notions – difficult and contests notions – of ‘nature’, ‘ecology’ and ‘environment’, preferring mainly to focus on largely anthropocentric/narrowly cultural notions of politics, community, gender, sexuality and race. We can see this in the extent to which terms such as theatricality and performativity have been used in theatre and performance studies as tools of/for the deconstruction of ‘human identity’, not to deconstruct, from a biocentric position, separatist and exceptionalist notions of human ‘nature’. In Heideggerian terms, theatre, as the Greek term *theatron* suggests, has been figured and practised as a site of appearance, a *techne* of visibility, a place of ideological contestation and unveiling where the invisible is made visible. The few scholars who have explored theatre’s relationship with ecology and environment have done so from particular positions, some of which contradict and negate each other, and some of which are silent about opposing views. In the first instance, I think of Baz Kershaw’s critique of Una Chaudhuri’s rejection of nature as metaphor or backdrop in naturalist and modernist dramas in her article “‘There Must Be a Lot of Fish in that Lake’: Toward an Ecological Theatre” (1994). For Chaudhuri, theatre’s ecological potential can be best harnessed by turning towards the literal – that is, by creating plays which deal directly with recognisably ecological issues, and which provide a metatheatrical or self-conscious critique of their own semiotic operations. Distancing herself from the more complex and expansive notion of theatre ecology, advanced by the US critic Bonnie Marranca (‘There Must be a Lot of Fish’), this way of thinking explains Chaudhuri’s support for a play such as Spalding Gray’s *Terrors of Pleasure*, in which Gray deconstructs, in a purposively non-dramatic sense (Gray relies on the spoken word alone and stages himself as a persona rather than actor), his own spectacular investment in what we might

call the real estate version of the American pastoral. In his book *Theatre and Ecology: Environments and Performance Events*, Kershaw argues that Chaudhuri's appeal to the literal tends to forget the place in which theatre occurs, the auditorium, where human beings are reified into ocular commodities. For Kershaw, the black box theatre, no matter how 'poor' it might be, is not a literal space, but a zoo:

Chaudhuri's appeal to the literal is not, however, the result of any lack of ecological insight, as she develops a highly reflexive critique of theatre's protocols. Rather, the problem is in the object of her attentions, the theatre itself and its production of spectators. It is through the latter that theatre contains the 'culture' (which includes 'nature') created by performance like a glass-walled zoo, hermetically sealing it off from ecological engagement of the most significant kinds. The 'zoo' is all the more effective because its main component – the making of spectatorship – has been achieved, as it were invisibly, as the attention of audiences, critics, and historians has primarily focused upon the on-stage action. (Kershaw 311–12)

Kershaw's implicitly Heideggerian solution to Chaudhuri's static scopism, with its production of spectators, is to abandon the theatre house, and instead to move towards alternative venues, towards the type of spaces that are associated with site-specific theatre. For all his enthusiasm for site-based work, Kershaw doesn't provide a detailed analysis of how site-specific participation might form an alternative ecological value-system. Rather, as with many practitioners and champions of this mode of performance, site-specific theatre, like the Rousseauesque festival it has such close links with, is simply assumed to be environmentally progressive because it provides a greater sense of mobility and (supposed) participation for its audiences. But is this enough? And what of the idea first promoted by Merleau-Ponty, and later developed by Eva Shawn Howard, that the eye is a "fingery" organ that plunges the viewer into a world of materialised perception (Haraway 249)?

[Insert from Ralph:

'site-specific' work – and I am thinking here particularly in the UK of Bryth Gof/Mike Pearson, of Goat Island and Lone Twin; in South Africa/Netherlands of Odd Enginears, all companies who create 'performance events' – is an attempt to disclose the energies of the site (industrial or 'natural') and/or the time (both of the performance itself and of the historical moment it evokes). Place and moment are thus 'real' in these two senses, as well as imaginary in terms of their symbolic/narrative status. They are (f)actors in the event; they invite the audience to engage with them, rather than editing them out in favour of the imaginary. So site is attended to in a more focused way and is accorded an agency.

Explorations of site and place now often work less with notions of solidity and fixity than with a sense of movement (performance) across time and perspective. Narratives of place are contested, multiple.

I'm not sure if this is 'enough', but it is going some way towards a rather different mode of engaging with both site and performance.]

In the context of ecological criticism, a related but different problem for Theatre and Performance Studies concerns the reluctance of scholars to see themselves and their approaches as forming part of an expanded field of study (there is, for instance, no equivalent to eco-criticism in theatre studies). It is telling that a recent publication on the work of the experimental theatre collective Goat Island, *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology and Goat Island* (2008) makes no mention of the more pragmatic research of Theresa May and Larry K. Fried's *Greening Up Our Houses: A Guide to a More Ecologically Sound Theatre* (1994). Similarly, Kurt Gerard Heinlein's *Green Theatre* (2008) allows no space for the materiality of theatre itself, the fact that it deals with presentation as much as representation, bodies as much as signs, that it might exist as a sophisticated mode of ecological practice in and by itself, and so allow for a mode of ecological theatre that would avoid ideological slogans and messages.

Likewise, Bonnie Marranca and Elinor Fuchs, although their respective concepts of 'ecology' and 'landscape' stress the importance of space in the environmental experiments of Gertrude Stein, Robert Wilson and Heiner Müller, have little to say about the materiality of the theatre event – the entangled and embodied gathering of human animals as both spectators and actors – and/or site-based performance¹. Such absence is also present in Downing Cless's *Ecology and Environment in European Drama* (2010) which, as with Chaudhuri's argument in *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, takes a specifically hermeneutic approach to the ecological significance of dramatic texts.

Paradoxically, what is missing in theatre and performance studies is an ecology of the discipline's relationship with ecology, a study that would make connections, analyse the biodiversity of the field, look at its different modes of practice, and articulate the always contingent applicability of its methods. As far as I am aware, there has been no sustained attempt to interrogate or theorise the diverse ways in which theatre and performance, in all its forms, might contribute to ecological thought or enhance environmental perceptions. The only publications of which I am aware that attempt to do this are the edited collection *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts* (2005), and two forthcoming special editions of the journals *Performance Research* and *Research in Drama and Education*. Tellingly, and I hope that I am not breaking a confidence here, one of the editors of the two journals expressed his/her disappointment that many of the submissions s/he had received from performance practitioners and theorists seemed to be unaware of the theoretical debates raging in eco-criticism, green political theory, and ecosophy over the contested meanings inherent in such key words as 'nature', 'environment', 'location', 'sustainability', 'resilience', etc. Which brings me to what we intend to do today: one of the aims of this paper, as I see it, is to attempt to look at the ecological possibilities offered by theatre and performance, to theorise the different ways in which they operate according to their own 'ecologies', do their own environmental thinking. For the great irony here is that theatre and performance have

¹ See Marranca, Fuchs & Chaudhuri.

been practising ecology ever since they came into being. Of all the arts, theatre is the one that most needs to sustain a relationship with a physical or concrete spatial environment, the one that can only take place between organisms, be they actors, dancers, spectators, writers, designers, lighting systems, costumes, floorboards, etc.

However, for all our interest in tracing the ecological potential in diverse theatrical forms and practices, I do not believe that there is an ontology of ecological aesthetics. For me, ecological meaning/perception does not reside within works in some ahistorical, metaphysical space; rather, ecological sense, like aesthetic sense, is something that is specific, contingent, and dependent on the spectator to activate it. In other words, I think that we have to argue it, be willing to make use of performances, texts, documents which on the surface might have little to do with ecological concerns such as toxicity, species depletion, global warming or over-population. I concur with Jacques Rancière's claim that:

There is no criterion for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics. This has nothing to do with the claim made by some people that art and politics should not be mixed. They intermix in any case; politics has its aesthetics, and aesthetics has its politics. But there is no formula for an appropriate correlation. (Rancière 62)

One final point: Ralph and Franc might disagree with this, and it might be something that we come back to, but in my section of this address I want to talk about theatre and ecology or theatre ecologies rather than environmental theatre and/or green theatre. For me, environmental theatre lacks the political and ethical will to change society (I think here of Félix Guattari's critique of environmentalism in *The Three Ecologies* (2008: 35), and also of Arne Naess's expansive notion of deep ecology that was first advanced in a paper given in Bucharest in 1972), and green theatre tends to be too narrowly ideological and focus-based. I prefer ecology because it establishes a symbiotic link between human and non-human nature, between what we might call after Murray Bookchin (1), while rejecting the dialecticism involved in his idea of stewardship, 'natural ecology' and social 'ecology' (and I include 'cultural ecology' in the latter).

Ensembles and ecologies

Franc Chamberlain

I think we have to be careful how we articulate the difference between an environmental theatre and an ecology of theatre. It seems to me that Carl is thinking of 'environmental theatre' in terms of green activist theatre, or at least a theatre concerned with addressing or intervening in issues of environmental concern. I don't agree that this kind of theatre necessarily lacks "the ethical and political will to change society" but I think that we might best describe this as an 'environmentalist theatre'. Richard Schechner's book *Environmental Theater* (1973/1994) is more about the ecologies of theatre and theatre ecology than it is about eco-political activism as such. I would argue

that Schechner's text can be used to support an environmentalist theatre agenda, but I think that it's important not to confuse the two. Schechner provides six axioms for Environmental Theatre and these include the notion that, from the point of view of Environmental Theatre:

environment can be understood in two different ways. First there is what one can do with and in a space. Secondly, there is the acceptance of a given space. In the first case one creates an environment by transforming a space; in the second case, one negotiates with an environment. (Schechner, *Environmental* xxx)

I think that as we explore the idea of 'negotiating with' an environment we can begin to explore the possibility of treating that environment seriously, not simply as raw material to be transformed into theatrical scenery. In discussing his fifth axiom, "all production elements speak their own language," Schechner explicitly raises the question of the position of the human within the production: "Why should the performer be any more important than other production elements? Because she/he is human?" (Schechner, *Environmental* xl). This question is important because it has the potential to shake up our thinking about theatre and other kinds of performance. Some artists have been urging us to consider this for some time and we might consider, for example, the work of Anna Halprin or Min Tanaka and the way in which it can perform a relationship with the environment that allows the various elements to 'speak their own language'. The work of Halprin and Tanaka can be easily covered by the label Environmental Theatre as used by Schechner, whilst at the same time they are also 'practising ecologies' in Carl's sense. If they are not 'environmentalist' they are at least more 'environmentally friendly' in being aware of the footprints of their work. Not all performance work has this ecological awareness, in fact most of it doesn't. In the introduction to their recently published collection of essays entitled *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May remind us that: "Theatrical production is hard on the environment: as theater is currently practiced in the West today, most of the resources that go into making theatre are wasted" (Arons and May 6).

It should be clear by now that we are not going to focus on eco-critical readings of dramatic texts. For us the text is just one of the many components of theatre, perhaps we might say one aspect of the theatre's ecology. This, of course, doesn't mean that we will be excluding the dramatic text from our discussion. One way to consider the relationship of theatre to ecology is to think of the history of theatre spaces and their relationship to the wider environment and the use made of material resources, including the construction of temporary or permanent playing spaces and the use made of found spaces. Another approach would be to consider the relationships between actors, audiences and their environments. We might also consider the ecology of a theatre company. All of these elements are considered in *Readings in Performance and Ecology* to some extent but there is very little emphasis on the ecology of the group or ensemble. Ensemble is a key element of the alternative or experimental theatre of the past 120 years

and encourages a shift from an egological to an ecological subjectivity. Schechner devotes a chapter of *Environmental Theater* to ‘Group’ in a wide-ranging discussion that, amongst other things, engages with recurrent problems in establishing effective democratic processes within an ensemble.

Whilst Schechner’s reflections on group process are an important contribution to our understanding of the social and mental ecology of a theatre group, I’m going to discuss a superficially less tangled consideration of the ensemble: the work of Michael Chekhov’s ‘ensemble feeling’.

Michael Chekhov and the Ecology of the Ensemble

The Russian teacher and actor Michael Chekhov (1891–1955) is one of a number of theatre practitioners of the early twentieth century, such as Konstantin Stanislavsky and Jacques Copeau, who were interested in the importance of ensemble acting and also in the possibility of a new relationship between actors and ‘nature’. To some extent there was an attempt to return theatre to the earth in an attempt to rediscover supposed natural rhythms and creativity, but not as a complete rejection of the urban theatre. Chekhov, exiled from Russia in the late 1920s, was invited to set up a theatre school at Dartington in rural Devon and opened a short-lived Theatre Studio there in 1936.

The theatre is a collaborative art and this is axiomatic in Chekhov’s work. One of the key problems is how to get individuals to work together effectively by establishing an ensemble feeling, what we might refer to as an ensemble ecology or the ecology of the ensemble.

In Chekhov’s view, the feeling of the ensemble could be generated by an open-hearted contact with one’s partners and a willingness to put aside any personal differences and be open to the ‘creative impulses’ of the other actors in the room. This open-hearted connection, according to Chekhov, would lead organically to a positive atmosphere in which the actors would be able to play together even within the confines of a well-rehearsed production. For Chekhov: “Only artists united by a true sympathy into an improvising ensemble can know the joy of unselfish, common creation” (Chekhov, *To the Actor* 35). The members of a theatrical ensemble must, according to Michael Chekhov, “find the right connection with each other in order to establish a consistent harmony amongst themselves” (Chekhov, *On the Technique* 121), and he provides a number of examples of how to develop this harmony.

The opposite of an open-hearted contact, according to Chekhov, is an ungenerous and fearful attitude which isolates the actor and inhibits the flow of creative improvisation. Chekhov acknowledges that people have different feelings towards each other, a range of sympathies and antipathies, but argues that the actor needs to take positive steps to be friendly towards others in the ensemble (Chekhov 2004: Disk 4, Track 9).

Chekhov warns against wallowing in sentimentality; the exercise is to generate an appropriate professional relationship for the work. The aim is to generate a supportive network of affective bonds where each individual is able to be in (inner) contact with

every other individual whilst the work is in progress. Such a network would be enhanced by a warm atmosphere which would support creative exploration and experimentation.

Perhaps we can see Chekhov as working at the interface between mental and social ecology. Mental ecology deals with issues of our mental health, of how resilient and resistant our psyches are and the conditions we need in which to thrive, together with an awareness of how pathogenic factors are easily produced and reproduced. What needs to thrive is not just rationality but also affects and fantasies. The necessary conditions are both intrapersonal and interpersonal: we have to develop a healthy attitude towards ourselves and others, one which seeks to liberate each other's creativity.

For Chekhov the enhanced interpersonal receptivity, which was essential to the formation of an ensemble, was capable of being extended into further dimensions. This requires a shift away from simply thinking of an ensemble as a group of actors. Chekhov claimed that actors needed to create a "feeling of ensemble" with the room, the objects in it, and the audience (2004: Disk 4 Track 9). The inclusion of the audience in the ensemble feeling reinforces the consideration of the socio-ecological dimension and raises questions not only about the ethics of the actor-audience relationship, but also the broader social ecology of the theatre. It's important to note that Chekhov also includes architecture and objects in his ensemble practice. To be present in performance, the actors need to be in contact with each other, the space and the audience, and this notion of presence, which we might also call mindfulness, models a way of being that can be extended beyond the theatre in our relationships with our world.

We can begin to see that Michael Chekhov's training for actors involves the becoming of ecological subjectivities which are produced through the work in the theatre laboratory but need not, and in Chekhov's view, should not, remain confined there.

Some dimensions of a performance ecology

Ralph Yarrow

I'd like to start by quoting a useful definition Carl gives of different models of ecology in an email exchange between us all. He says: In very simple terms, the difference between surface environmentalism and deep ecology is similar to that between light and dark greens. Surface environmentalists think that ecological change can occur through changes in technology and or economic production (recycling, carbon footprints, conservation policies, development of new technologies), whereas deep ecologists, as Naess suggests, are interested in a full-scale transformation of our being in the world, and with our relation with 'nature'. Deep ecologists are, for example, interested in deconstructing anthropocentrism and opening oneself to a more biocentric approach. Western and Eastern philosophy play an important role in their thought.

However, deep ecologists, and I agree with this, are sometimes criticised by Marxist and Anarchist philosophers (in particular Murray Bookchin) for ignoring politics and so forgetting about what is at stake in social ecology. In the rush to dethrone human exceptionalism and to extend the remit of environmental justice to non-human things, there is a tendency to downplay or forget the link between environmentalism and socio-

political justice. The fact that poor people are the ones placed next to toxic waste dumps, motorways, and asked to work with hazardous chemicals. This is the point that Priscilla seemed to be making in her paper in Bucharest (at least the bit that I heard). It's also the point that Guattari makes so forcefully in *The Three Ecologies*.

From Carl's gloss of "surface environmentalist" (light green) and "deep ecologist" (dark green) I guess I buy into both. Is it because humanity to some extent means to both act responsibly as "stewards," and to "transform our being in the world"? In a way the second would imply the first, wouldn't it? I am also thinking again, being in India now, about a way of performance that is rooted in ecoknowledge, in the sense that much of the *Natya Sastra's* programme for actors (see below) couldn't really operate without the underpinning of forms of indigenous medical and martial arts – and other systems in e.g. Mexico, Greece and Japan have strong similarities in this respect. You see for instance on the videos of training for 'traditional' Indian performance forms – e.g. Kathakali – how trainees are massaged extensively in preparation for performance classes. The structural knowledge of the body, the use of oils and herbs, the setting even (at first light, softly enhanced by candles) all emphasise a kind of physical contiguity with the matter of the natural world.

At the moment, the monsoon is approaching. Rehearsing under the mango trees is occasionally punctuated by the thud of falling fruit; one night with (unusually) some artificial lights on, a sudden swarm of insects almost blots them out. The insects, I am told, are a sign that rain is on the way. Someone switched the lights off for a while. When they were switched on again, to my surprise, the insects didn't return. They had moved on elsewhere. I presumed that both the switching off of the lights and the moving of the insects were kinds of knowing.

I also take the point about not overlooking the political aspects. For the company I'm working with (Jana Sanskriti, India's leading Boalian/Theatre of the Oppressed operation) that is paramount. They work with the people who are most likely to be in the situations Carl mentions, using theatre processes as a conscious way of engaging with cultural, political and spatial realities. So if they make a commitment to them, they keep it. They just went to do a performance in a distant village, in spite of the unexpected heat for this time of year (it's been hovering around 40 Centigrade). Six hours in an open truck to get there; two performances in different villages; not much sleep given the heat, and the need to be very sparing with water after performing, in spite of the sweat, because otherwise a group of 15 performers could use up the locals' whole supply; then back again. The strands of connection with the *oikos* – in quite a lot of the senses in which we will talk about it – seem to be multiple here.

For me, as a maker of what I think of as theatre and performance, as a performer, perhaps as a reader too, performance means: a process of perpetual transformation; doing things which change the state of things; creating things which (temporarily) have a shape

Again for me, this implies: finding the condition(s) in which I 'move' most easily; feeling myself to be open, available, switched on, in touch; being aware that energy is focused; sometimes being surprised by what I can discover, propose, or do

So my take on performance is that it is in some way an 'ideal'. That implies that most of the time I am approaching it (or regretting that I am not), that it is a sort of receding goal as well as an occasional achievement. Because what the two sets of bullet-pointed criteria indicate is a situation in which potentiality of being is more available than localised versions of 'myself'. It is a bit further down the track than Rimbaud's celebrated "Je est un Autre": I am a whole series of others, of possibilities of being other. (Maybe then 'I' is most significantly the possibility of 'otherness'? 'I' is that which may relate.)

I think an ecology is a mode of knowing about as wide a sphere of our 'surrounding' world as possible. (In some sense of course we can never be separate from that world, though for most practical purposes some kind of distinction not only is experienced but is also necessary, e.g. for us to talk about it.)

That seems to imply (for me) some investigation of, some work on, kinds of learning and knowing (rather than 'knowledge') which would include cognitive, affective and motoric processes.

These processes are, like the play of successive forms of self, not static, but ways of being and becoming. Are they also ways of acting? An ethics? A politics?

Habits of (im)perfection

In terms then of the relationship between performance and ecology, can we put that as simply as possible and relate it quite precisely to performers, to actor-training, to spaces, to duration and rhythm of 'a performance'? What might this tell us about the parameters of performance and how we 'make' and receive it? In what ways does performance practise ecoknowledge in this sense?

It activates a network of interactions and forms of engagement with/in the individual (through training, bodily and sensory extension – limbs, movements, capacities, sensitivities, receptivities, offerings, exchanges). Training histories and practices include Zeami/Noh; the *Natya Sastra*; Grotowski; Copeau; Gardzienice; 'theatre laboratory' work; Nunez; Stanislavsky; Meyerhold; Feldenkrais; etc. In the context of developments in 'western' performance practice and training over the last century, many of these occur 'in nature' or as 'encounters' with 'other' forms of practice, and thus specifically target an extension of human being towards 'extra-daily' (Barba) sensory abilities and intelligences.

In this kind of approach, a set of performance moves aims to amend and/or extend daily functioning, to shift the mode of knowing and in so doing to emphasise criteria of flow, agency, response and availability, spontaneous forming.

In terms of those (from the 'western' perspective) 'other' forms, which include the Japanese and Indian examples referred to above but also many kinds of practice from other zones, aspects of what Schechner calls 'environmental performance' and Turner locates as liminal/liminoid (see our discussions in *Sacred Theatre* on this) relate to

precise attempts to negotiate the sensitivities and knowledges perceived as being on the border between the human and the environmental, often for specific (ritual and efficacious) purposes connected with seasonal or cosmic rhythms. Here, although particular 'specially-charged' individuals may play key transitional roles, the process is primarily oriented towards the group or social nexus.

ii) the group (all the above extended to the interactive mode; group process as both an extension and a heightening of individual functioning; receptivity and response; mutual recognition and responsibility). Modes of operation: improvisation practices including Stanislavsky, Meisner, Johnstone, Johnston, Callery; collective devising and co-creation; drama therapies and applied drama work.

iii) the play – or better, the performance event – in relation to the audience (or co-participants), the space/site, society.

In the case of both ii) and iii), a performative ecology of another kind is in operation whereby the parameters of the 'known' are being reshaped: as changes are produced in how we relate to each other and to our (immediate, sensory, aesthetic, intellectual, cultural, political) environment, both losses and gains occur. None of these things cannot happen in other situations, but it's worth recalling that theatre and performance, for practitioners and spectators in different ways at different times, requires or incites kinds of processing and action which, generally, seem to be more complex, more 'holistic', than most of our everyday activity. It may be that they are just more conscious, because 'framed' by the performative circumstance. Here we need a psychobiology (in part approached by Schechner and Zarrilli). It's not irrelevant that e.g. major strands of Indian, Japanese and Chinese performance are based in forms of martial art, nor that Jacques Lecoq – perhaps the best-known of recent European performance-trainers – started working life as a sports instructor. He encapsulates one of the aims of his work as the focus on the intelligence of the body: "l'homme pense avec son corps," he says.

Let's look at one case, the Indian concept of *rasa* or aesthetic sensitivity. In this understanding, performance is conceived as an extension of the composing and receiving faculties, as subtle and dynamic rhythmicities and sensitivities, so that the modality of operation is 'standing on end', picking up all the possible dimensions and relations of each channel of signification in the created and received performance text/event (musical, rhythmic, tonal, visual, metaphorical etc.). It is a honing of attention in order to operate at the limits and in the interstices of these channels of sensory experience, a kind of intense synaesthesia if you will; and the underlying assumption is that producing (and being trained to produce) and receiving work is an active process for performers and spectators which tunes them up or in to their fullest extent. The surrounding mythology implies that they are in contact with 'divine' levels, but the process is material, psychophysiological and immanent. The founding text, the *Natya Sastra*, also lays weight on the space in which the event occurs, including the materials used to construct it, its axes of orientation, the way that air flows in and out of it.

I was thinking about an experience I had once, about 40 years ago, down by the Yare. I'd been working on my thesis and then I went for a walk, so my awareness was

open and my body was relishing movement and sensation. The wind was blowing the grasses and rippling the water. I stopped. Suddenly it was as if I flowed into the wind and the grass and the movement of the water. I was not different from them, I was in some way co-extensive with them.

Later I found Julia Martin writing:

‘The pattern is the ripple of sand and the crests and troughs of tiny waves reflected on stone. Sun shines through, ripple of wave. This flowing.’ She concludes: ‘Here is the place, here is where everything changes.’ (Martin 136)

However, as Carl will now point out, things may not always be as smooth as that.

Contra Aristotle: or on having a big toe

Carl Lavery

As I mentioned earlier, this absence of a sophisticated interrogation of the ecological possibilities within theatre and performance scholarship is ironic in that theatre and performance have, in their practices, long-troubled dualistic notions of what is meant by human and non-human, culture and nature. Think here of the terminology of theatre with its recourses to ideas of field work, laboratories, environments, and landscapes. Or what about pageant plays, site-specific performance, body art, and body weathering? In light of these factors, the obvious question to pose, then, is why, when theatre and performance appear to possess such relevant ecological potential, have scholars and critics persisted in focusing their attention on narrowly cultural or anthropocentric meanings?

To get some handle on this – at least with respect to the Western theatre - we need to go back, I think, to Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In *The Poetics*, as its title suggests, Aristotle’s objective is on policing the constituent elements of drama; he talks much about character, conflict, language, reversal, revelation, climax, resolution, but little space is given to scenography, space or acting. Everything that is physical about theatre, everything, that is, to do with the materiality of the body, is evacuated. This is what the German theorist Samuel Weber has to say:

To be sure, in his *Poetics*, Aristotle does everything to reduce or marginalize whatever might be considered specific to the medium of theatre: spatiality, materiality, visibility.... He thereby reduces the specifically spatial and scenic aspects of theatre to mere material accessories and instruments for representing something that bears no necessary or specific relation to theatre as such, namely action.... It is this Aristotelian approach to theatre, construing it in terms of objects and structures that are not themselves specifically theatrical, that pervades the Western approach to theatre, which initially privileges action, and then in the modern period, character (Weber 33).

It is surely no coincidence, moreover, that the aim of theatre, for Aristotle, is *catharsis* – the purification of disruptive anti-social affect, the affect that plays itself out in our nerve endings, skin, and blood, the affect that reminds us that we are nature.

Drawing on Aristotle's famous definition of the human being as 'a speaking animal' in *The Politics*, we might say that, according to his view, going to the theatre is an exercise in leaving the animal behind, an attempt to abstract ourselves from nature, to place ourselves securely in the realm of culture, speech, and law. Such a desire, however – and this explains why Plato, for all his suspicions to the contrary, is so much closer to understanding what theatre can do – is always undone by the fact that theatre has to take place, that for purification to occur (if it ever does occur) we have to be affected and infected, made to experience the very animality that Aristotle is so keen, in his theatre going, to transcend.

Western theatre's anxiety over the animality of the body, what we might call after Georges Bataille its "accursed share," is perhaps also apparent, I would argue, in the fact that Greek actors were compelled to wear buskins to cover their feet (and we could see this vestimentary prohibition as a type of synecdoche for later prohibitions against women and nudity on stage) in an attempt to hide the paradoxical and perverse reality of the big toe.

Distancing himself from the idealism of Surrealist walkers such as André Breton and Louis Aragon, and concentrating on physical matter – nature 2 Bataille argues "that the big toe is the most human part of the body, in the sense that no other element of this body is as differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape (chimpanzee, gorilla, orangutan, or gibbon" (Bataille 20). Yet if the big toe is what defines humanness by elevating bodies from the earth towards the sky, the thing that distances us from our close cousins, the apes, Bataille is quick to point out that "whatever the role played in the erection by his foot, man, who has a light head, in other words a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has his foot in the mud." This recognition of our dependency on the earth – on nature – according to Bataille, produces a sense of inner violence caused by "the rage of seeing oneself as a back and forth movement from refuse to ideal, and from the ideal to refuse – a rage that is easily directed against an organ as base as the foot" (Bataille 20–1). As well as violence, the materialism of the foot, what Bataille refers to as "base seduction" (Bataille 23), produces a host of symptoms which trouble the idealism and rationality of philosophy and art:

Man willingly imagines himself to be like the god Neptune, stilling his own waves, with majesty; nevertheless, the bellowing waves of the viscera, in more or less incessant inflation and upheaval, brusquely put an end to his dignity. Blind but tranquil and strangely despising his obscure baseness, a given person, ready to call to mind the grandeurs of history, as when his glance ascends a monument testifying to the grandeur of his nation, is stopped in mid-flight by an atrocious pain in his big toe because, though, the most noble of animals, he nevertheless has corn on his feet; in other words, he has feet, and these feet lead an ignoble life (1985: 22).

To have feet, Bataille suggests, is to participate in an agonized performance; one where the body is simultaneously desired and despised, and where culture exists as a fetish, a sublimated consolation, that denies our animality. According to Bataille, if we

are to come to terms with this world, to live more democratically and less violently together as humans – and we want to extend biocentrically to include the earth – then such a self-deceptive comedy needs to be exposed for what it is: a mere shadow play: “A return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening his eyes wide: opening them wide, then, before a big toe” (Bataille 23).

Although Bataille says little about theatre in ‘The Big Toe’ (he merely mentions “the high soles” of tragic actors (Bataille 21), his attack on anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism, endows theatre with transgressive potential. Theatre’s capacity to create a semiotic fiction, to put what Ionesco might call “le piéton dans l’air” (“the walker in the air”), is necessarily subject to the forces of gravity. As Nick Ridout has shown in *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, no other medium has such a capacity to stumble and totter, and, ultimately, to disenchant: “theatre’s failure, when theatre fails, is not anomalous, but somehow, perhaps constitutive” (Ridout 5). Theatre’s pre-programmed tendency to fail cannot help but focus attention on the body. This is precisely why, I think, that practitioners such as Tadeusz Kantor, Jean Genet and Heiner Müller were so attracted to it, believing that theatre, with its emphasis on presentness and transience, could be a pedagogy of death, a way of puncturing the screen. For these artists, in what is an essentially tragic or catastrophic recognition, theatre allows for an Yves Klein-like leap into the void; it opens our eyes to a solid abyss, the stubborn opacity of the body.² In this respect, theatre is not only made by the feet of performers; it is an extension of the foot in and by itself, a festering limb. Or as Genet might have it, a laceration in the heart of culture, a pungent acephale. “If my theatre stinks, it is because the others smell so sweet” (Genet 68). In its insistence on the body, and, by extension, nature, theatre wrecks all idealism, becoming in the process a tool of profanation, a cruel medium, a sort of big toe. This shift gives rise to an alternative view of aesthetic politics. With respect to ecology, then, the objective is no longer to communicate a message or to offer an image of hope; on the contrary, to recall Ridout’s notion of failure, theatre should instead aim to provoke an encounter with base materiality, to situate itself in all that is abjected, repressed, excluded – in what we might see as a non-sublimated view of nature.

If Western theatre has traditionally been troubled by the animality of the human body, then it also been made anxious by its relationship with the natural environment, by sunlight, rivers, mountains. Its tendency to retreat from the expanded *oikos* or home of earth into the “dark house” of the theatre world, generated by what Brecht called its “electric suns,” is what has caused critics such as Plato in *The Republic* and Rousseau in ‘Lettre à d’Alembert’ to be so vehemently anti-theatrical in their prejudices. Since its inception, theatre in the West has always been linked with the *agora*, with, that is, the market place of the city. Think here of Shakespeare’s Globe in Southwark, described by Heiner Müller in his wonderful essay ‘Shakespeare a Departure’, as a place populated by prostitutes,

² In French, the word to leap translates as *jeter*. The homonym *j’étais* (‘I was’) establishes an existential link between leaping and being. One cannot leap without feet.

gamblers, thieves, the urban poor; or of the site of the Comédie Française situated just opposite the Louvre in Paris, at the very heart of the royal city, or of the location of Broadway in New York City, which led the great British actor Mark Rylance, in his recent run there in Jez Butterworth's play *Jerusalem*, to seek out the Hudson River in a desperate attempt to reconnect with something 'natural'. Like philosophy and post-Augustinian theology, theatre, then, has historically been an art of the city – an art of buildings, publics, the *polis*, an art that tries to expel the 'natural'. It is tempting here to recast Socrates, in his dialogue with Phaedrus, as a theatre director. Asked by Phaedrus why he only walks within the parameters of Athens, Socrates replies: "Look Phaedrus: I'm a lover of learning, and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the city will." But Socrates here, as with many of our theatre directors past and present, has forgotten three things. First, that he has a big toe; second, that human beings are animals; and third that the city is nature. In this context, it is interesting to note how Heiner Müller feels closest to Shakespeare in Genoa, "at night in the town centre built in the Middle Ages, and near the harbour" (Müller 100). Müller's intuition, his imaginative proximity to Shakespeare, is based on the revelation, I think, that the city both includes and is nature, and that theatre, for all its boxed-offness, is a type of sea, a non-striated space where we can take flight on wave after wave of affect, on a reflux of bodies moving, on the surf of breath.

Putting Aristotle Back on his Feet (but not his Pedestal) and Dancing with the Bees

Franc Chamberlain

Accusing Aristotle of both disregarding the materiality of theatre and using theatre as an instrument for social control raises a number of questions, two of which I'll make explicit here. The first is whether or not Aristotle does disregard the materiality of theatre. The view that he does is based on his comments on spectacle in chapter six of *The Poetics* where he claims that spectacle is the least important of the elements of tragedy and that the tragic effect is possible without public performance, a claim he repeats in chapter fourteen. A second question is whether or not Aristotle considered that the purpose of tragedy was to remove us from the animal.

To take the second first: it's true that Aristotle held the view that there was an hierarchy of species, and that humanity was at the top. It's also the case that he considered that there were inter-species hierarchies: men were above women and free men and women were above slaves and that these arrangements were fixed and natural. But Aristotle didn't separate the human from the animal because, for him, humans were animals by definition. Yes, humans have language but this is a product of nature, the human is an animal who speaks. And humans also have a moral sense, but that again is a fruit of nature. Many animals have common attributes and sensibilities and Aristotle discussed human reproduction in the same manner as he discussed the reproductive behaviours of other animals. And the formulation 'other animals' is important because throughout his works this is how he discusses a species of animal in relation to the rest of its genus, whether that single species be human or cattle or cats.

There is a network of animals and one thing that they have in common is their dependence on touch. In *De Anima* Aristotle wrote: “Without touch it is impossible for an animal to be” (17–18) and in chapter three of the *Historia Animalium*: “One of the senses, and only one, is common to all animals viz., touch.” This ‘touch’ is not ‘mere sensation’, as some might have it, but something more important. Heller-Roazen suggests that Aristotle’s view of awareness and self-awareness is that they are aspects of sensation and that this contrasts with a more familiar contemporary view of awareness being a species of cognition that conceals its history:

The “thinking being” of modernity conceals a past still to be uncovered, in which the relations between cogitation and perception, thought and feeling, were not what they became, and in which sensation, the primary power of the tactile being, held the key to the life of all beasts, no less the two legged one who would raise himself up above those around him (Heller-Roazen 41).

Sheets-Johnstone, also reminding us both of the importance of touch for Aristotle, and that humans are animals, shows how touch matters:

Along with movement, tactility is the premier faculty of living things. Other senses may be destroyed in one way or another, yet the animal still lives. With the death of the tangible, however, comes the death of the animal itself. (Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn* 137)

Although humans have the capacity for language, which, according to Aristotle and many since, other animals lack, it is grounded in movement and touch. Remove all capacity for sensation from the human and there is no language.

Aristotle, then, embeds the human firmly and materially in the natural world; an animal amongst other animals. The human act of building cities is as natural as that of bees creating hives – we’re agreed on that. But, whatever Socrates may have forgotten, according to Carl, Aristotle doesn’t forget that humans are animals, that cities are part of nature, that he can learn from trees, and that his big toe is related to the digits of other animals – anthropoid or otherwise. From this perspective it wouldn’t make any sense for Aristotle to claim the theatre as a means to ‘leave the animal behind’. Indeed, the inclusion of satyr plays in the Festival of Dionysus indicates that even if tragedy were able to temporarily effect such a transportation, the theatre itself would quickly remind the spectators of their animality.

It is not altogether clear, from *The Poetics*, what exactly Aristotle meant by *catharsis*. In *The Politics* he promises to discuss it more fully in *The Poetics*, but he doesn’t do so. In one passage in the sixth chapter of Book Eight of *The Politics* he comments on how all animals feel the pleasure of music. This comment indicates the shared pleasures of music and raises the question as to whether non-human animals experience *catharsis*. It seems to me that Aristotle believes that they do; but through music not tragedy because of tragedy’s dependence on human language and the complexity of ethical thinking that’s involved.

Accepting, for the purpose of argument, that what Aristotle meant by *catharsis* through Tragedy was a purgation of fear and pity, it's not clear to me why this would be viewed as a purgation of 'anti-social affect' *per se*. Why is 'fear' an anti-social affect? Surely the purgation of fear, especially the fear of punishment or reprisal, is more likely to increase the possibility of challenges to oppressive and repressive state structures? Perhaps we need to read Aristotle differently. If we accept that all animals need to touch, that we learn and develop by reaching out, then fear can be considered an emotion that prevents us from reaching out and connecting with our fellow animals and the wider environment. 'Pity' is, perhaps, less obvious and we might be able to consider that we can become so wrapped up in pity, for ourselves or others, that we are unable to act or think effectively. It might be helpful here to consider the difference between pity and compassion; does the purgation of pity enable us to be more compassionate? If so the purgation of fear and pity might enable us to be both more open to the suffering of humans and other animals around us and more open to speaking out about the injustices that we witness. This would, ultimately, enable us to become better citizens and freely disagree with Aristotle's support for oppressive attitudes towards women and the institution of slavery. Pity and fear are anti-social insofar as they cut us off from other people and the world not because they invite us to effect changes in the ecology of the polis. If the aim of tragedy was to produce a docile public why wasn't the emphasis on a purgation of anger? Or hatred? Either of these is far more dangerous to an oppressive regime than fear or pity. Oppressive regimes thrive on fear and pity – if the people aren't afraid they may feel free to express their anger.

All affects "play out in our nerve endings, skin, and blood"; all affects have the capacity to "remind us that we are nature." But the question is, who is it that forgets?

Aristotle was not opposed to the passions, and pointed out that "we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions" (see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 2 Chapter 5). He thought that we could have either an excess or a lack of passions and needed to find an appropriate balance. From an Aristotelian perspective, it would not be helpful to have either an excess or a lack of fear. Who decides, though, what is an excess and what is a lack? In terms of social and mental ecology, we might answer these questions differently in 2012 from Aristotle's day.

It's also important for us to remember, what the Greeks were less likely to forget, that the performance of Ancient Tragedy was always deeply embedded within its environment, and made no attempt to separate itself from nature. The performances occurred in springtime, attuned to the agricultural cycles. The spectators sat on open hillsides under the sky, usually overlooking the sea, the permanence of the seating gradually evolved over time. Earth, Sea, Air and Fire were all present: a breeze from the sea would dampen the air which, drying in the sun, would leave salt particles on the skin. The sounds and the movements of animals, insect, birds and plants would touch, eyes, ears, and skin of the spectators, together with the sounds, movements and gestures of the actors. Any local environmental damage could be perceptible and itself a call to action. In addition, by the standards of subsequent theatres in the West, especially in the past two

hundred years, the Ancient Greek Theatre had a very light environmental footprint. Ancient Greek Theatre, then, needs to be considered within the multiple contexts of its environmental, social, and mental ecologies. [See also Ralph in Part 2 below.] Producing *Medea* in a black-box studio in the middle of Bucharest, or London, or Santiago, is likely to be much more disconnected from the material reality of changes in the social and environmental ecologies than the Ancient Greek Theatre could ever be. The black-box (which I love) could be anywhere and it's easy to forget exactly where you are, although not so easy, I'd suggest, to lose the sense that we are "animate forms geared in bodily meaningful ways to the world about [us]" (Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn* 278).

This brings us to the other question. Did Aristotle deny the materiality of theatre? I really don't think that this position is can be sustained by a close reading of *The Poetics*. Aristotle is quite clear that spectacle "must be a part of the whole" and that it is a key element in distinguishing the Tragedy from the Epic. There's no question but that Aristotle finds Tragedy to be the superior form and that he makes a defence against the charge that Tragedy is a "low" art by claiming that it can "produce its effect even without movement and action, in just the same way as Epic poetry" (Ch.6). This claim puts the Epic and Tragedy on the same level, Tragedy should not be seen as inferior because it uses music and movement and other elements of spectacle. In fact Aristotle goes a step further and argues that Tragedy is superior to the Epic because it has everything Epic has and more and this 'more' is music and spectacle. Put in another way, Aristotle is making a case for the materiality of Tragedy as being that which makes it superior to the Epic. We also need be careful that we don't make another commonly made error when considering *The Poetics*: Aristotle is not discussing the theatre or performance in general but focusing primarily on Tragedy, on one species of performance. To forget this is to lose the variety of performance forms that were available to Aristotle and confuse a species with the whole of its genus.

Putting Aristotle back on his feet, and remembering that Yves Klein didn't leap (or at least not in the way it appears), we might also consider the claim that buskins cover the big toe. Part of the definition of a buskin is that it is a shoe in which the toes are left exposed: buskins foreground the toes rather than hiding them. In this sense, rather than the buskin signaling an oppressive compulsion to cover the feet and hide the animality of the human, it is more the case that it is an assertion of the unseverable link between humanity and its animality and ecology. We can focus on hairy toes, bruised toes, swollen feet, cracked nails, corns, sexy toes, smooth skin, tanned toes, but not one of them tells the story of the relationship between theatre and ecology. We might, however, read from the condition of feet to the current status of the local ecology and resist a romantic poetics of pathology.

It is this unseverable link between humanity, animality, and ecology that I want to keep in mind. If we aren't thinking ecologically and act in bad faith with respect to our relationship to other animals and our shared environment, I don't think that Aristotle is to blame.

The recent decline in bee populations around the world is something which should concern us all. It looks likely that corporate agriculture with its unecological view of the world is at least partially to blame: research into the effects of the insect neurotoxin neonicotinoid, used as crop pesticides, on the bee colonies has suggested not only that the colonies reduce significantly in size, but also that their ability to produce queens is seriously impaired. (*The Guardian*, 29th March 2012) Bees are responsible for pollinating a high percentage of our food source so, simply on a level of human self-interest, we might want to ensure that the cause is found and the bees enabled to restore their populations. It's possible that other species will move to fill the gaps and the plants themselves adjust to become more attractive to them, but that might not be a risk that humans want to take.

I doubt that such an intimate and intricate link between the health of bees and the health of humans would have come as much of a surprise to Aristotle, although he might have been disturbed by our capacity and willingness to wreak havoc on our life-support systems. He might also have been surprised to discover that other animals have their own languages, what Sheets-Johnstone refers to as “primordial language” which is “rooted in tactile-kinesthetic experience” (Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn* 290). Drawing on evolutionary theory and evidence that wasn't available to Aristotle, Sheets-Johnstone argues that language evolves from bodily activity and we can see that such a process furthers our understanding of the connection between humans and other animals:

Primordial language was not a matter of naming, but a matter of indicating spatial relationships and bodily movement in relation to space. Kinetic corporeal representation indicates as much: it articulates a dynamic rather than static semantics; it is an analogically rather than arbitrarily formed semantics; and it is a relational rather than object tethered semantics. (Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn* 290)

One example of kinetic corporeal representation which has attracted much attention and debate, is the so-called waggle-dance of the honey bee. The bee returns to the hive from a reconnaissance flight and dances the direction and distance to a sugar source. The information conveyed also includes the difficulty of the flight and the concentration of the sugar. Sheets-Johnstone points out that this communication involves “metacorporeal” representation. It is metacorporeal because it points to something outside of the body, but which is experientially related to the body. The intensity of the dance indicates the density of the sugar. The sugar-density has been experienced through touch and this experience is analogically represented through the vigorousness of the dance.

Of course, the bee's dance isn't an aesthetic dance and is in what Turner would call the “indicative” rather than “subjunctive” mode (Turner 101), but it does indicate an evolutionary continuity from insect behaviour to human dance – particularly in its non-literal aspect. The next question is whether bees play. It's possible other insects do, and Darwin noted Huber's observation that ants would chase and pretend to bite each other “like so many puppies” (Darwin 448) and it's certain that other animals, not just humans

and primates, play. Perhaps play is something that evolves later than metacorporeal representation but articulating the evolutionary continuity Sheets-Johnstone asserts that: “Dance is older than man, in his bones as it were, in the form of an evolving empowering morphology and qualitative kinetics” (Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn* 324).

Sheets-Johnstone is writing about dance, not theatre, but, as Edward Gordon Craig reminded us in his 1905 dialogue ‘The Art of the Theatre’, the beginnings of theatre do not lie in the text but in movement and action and thus, the most anti-realist of the early-twentieth century theatre reformers connects himself, not necessarily with full awareness, to the non-human thread that runs through all human art.

Arons and May indicate, as Carl has done above, that Theatre Studies has been very slow to engage with eco-criticism and that, even in 2012, the terms ‘performance’ and ‘ecology’ don’t sit together easily. That’s not all:

One of the key means of shaping and transforming human attitudes and values is the arts, but the arts (in the West, at least [...]) have traditionally been conceived as the activity that most divides humans from nature.” (Arons and May 1)

What I’ve hoped to do in this section is to point towards a continuity of performance behaviours across species and offer a different reading of Aristotle that will enable us to see that theatre, and by extension, culture, is never separate from nature. When we pretend that it is, we are acting in bad-faith. Thinking in this way will enable us reconsider the supposed separation of theatre and nature in the present, but also in the past to remind us that, although we can never go back and although our own situation requires new solutions, Western culture in general, and theatre in particular, has not always been either eco- or biophobic.

Come and Go

Ralph Yarrow

“Tatwa twam asi.” I am that I am. That am-ness is not static. It is a potentiality to be both self and other, to be here and not here. “Let’s go. We can’t go.” *They don’t move*. But there is change, they are no longer in the same position vis-a-vis themselves (as characters) and the play/the audience/the theatre/time, or (as actors) vis-a-vis the characters. At the end of *Godot* there is a kind of nothing. It isn’t unlike the nothing at the beginning (no specific location, no clearly narrated history for the characters, no very comprehensible actions). But we ‘know’ a little more about this no-place, in between other no-places on some ill-frequented road, and the no-goers (irresolute, vacillating, reactive) who play out their ambivalence on it. At the end, even more than at the beginning, they can’t go and they can’t stop wanting to go. But neither staying nor going will change anything. Pozzo and Lucky have shown that coming and going only gets you towards having and knowing less than you did before. So Didi and Gogo (like Pozzo’s watch, repeaters both: of saying and going – but one repetition cancels out the other, so they mark time) have over two hours crystallised, materialised not-being-here-or-there-ness.

Absence of history, location, action: they can only be the potential of all these. They are still there; only there. This is a kind of non-knowing, a continuous *hésitation-avant-pensée* (Valéry). C'est ça, commencer (or that is *Comment C'est*). And whilst in this situation, they play their games, invent their moves – which, to pick up Carl's last point, are the stuff of failing, blundering, decrepit and largely inelegant bodies: they have big toes sticking out all over.

Maybe this qualifies as what Deleuze says about performance, that it is a “kind of participation in the life of matter”? Didi and Gogo are themselves a kind of (apparently) inert matter and the play in which they operate becomes a space in which whatever happens in such matter goes on: even more so in *End Game*, where, as Clov says, “quelque chose suit son cours.” This 'course' is not the teleology of our everyday logic, but maybe it is another kind of *logos*; the pace and the direction doing their own thing. It isn't always the same; and even though in Beckett's world entropy is inevitable, it may function in surprising ways: “décomposer c'est vivre aussi,” to quote the non-directional Molloy, and indirection may nevertheless be a method of changing both vision and condition.

If performance (in our examples, as engagement with training or ritual process, as walking or 'laboratory' work, or even in the form of more conventionally recognisable public spectacle, event, production or play) can in some way arrive at this alternative mode, it is not so much related to what the 'matter' of it is as to how participation in it takes place. Places can help (see my next section); but how I engage with them is the key thing, just as how I work with all 'matter' – the floor, the furniture, the objects, each shift of my musculature or gaze. What Didi and Gogo play with is the infinite possibility, the surprising truth, that where teleology falls away anything is possible.

Part 2 – continuations and complications

We reproduce here some of the email exchanges between us and developments from them around the continuation and extension of ideas and practices we raised in Part 1.

Ralph

In the second session we intended to say some more about site-specific work, to address the issue of the *oikos* and of notions of *heimlich/unheimlich*, linking this to understandings of performance as transformation, moving through, leaving behind; and to open up how far performance shifts awareness of the nature/culture dyad/spectrum and in what ways it does or doesn't generate a different take on ethics.

Franco

I really couldn't address the *oikos* -- I don't really think about the term (I know its ancient meaning and that it's the root of ecology and economics). I associate it with Heidegger, but I guess your reference is Derrida, Carl? I guess it opens up the question of 'stewardship'?

Carl

I took the *oikos* from the usual suspects – Guattari, Lyotard – and then folded it back into Heideggerian notions of home and homecoming. I suppose my main interest is in ecology and economics.

Location and Ecology: The OIKOS

If we consider the Greek etymology that lies behind the nineteenth-century word ecology invented by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel then we can see that not only is ecology inherently locational (an idea which is articulated in the notion of an environment), but that it guides our thinking about location in a very specific direction – namely, to ideas about what it might mean ‘to be at home’. Ecology is a composite word formed through the amalgamation of *oikos* (house, hearth, home) and *logos* (science and law). To be ecological, then, is to engage in a science of home-making, to make proper use – to husband – domestic resources. The economic dimension that haunts the meaning and practice of ecology, a ghosting that appears when we utter or say the word *oikos* as *ecos*, is teased out by the Jean-Francois Lyotard in his short 1988 essay *Oikos*. In that text, Lyotard points out how “when *oikos* gives rise to *oikonomikos* or *oikonomikon*, a complex transformation of the word *oikos* occurs. If economic means *öffentlich* [publicity]³, it implies that the *oikos* itself has slipped away elsewhere.” Importantly, Lyotard is not dismissing the fact that ecology is a type of home economics, to cite a work by the US environmental philosopher Wendell Berry, but that the logic it posits has little to do with economics as we conventionally understand it as, say, the regulation of exchange, the study of supply and demand, and the value of capital. For Lyotard, the economics of the *oikos* are to do with what he calls the “discourse of the secluded,” with everything that cannot be reduced to the law of exchange-value, brought into the open, marked. In Lyotard’s critique of cybernetics or systems theory, the economics of the *oikos* are an economics of play, an economics of what Bataille might call useless expenditure, an economics, that is, of the sun. According to Lyotard, the *oikos* troubles the anthropocentric and patriarchal logic of husbandry; it is a value whose law can never be determined or made relational, an immanent transcendence, a type of creative life-force, productivity. Interestingly, Lyotard associates the *oikos*, and by association, ecology, with exploited subalterns, that is with women, children, servants, animals:

Do we speak of the *oikos*, or is the *oikos* that speaks? Do we describe the *oikos* as an object, or is rather that we listen to it, to what it wants?....The *Oikeion* is the women, whose sex is *oikeion*; the children, whose generation is also *oikeion*; the servants, everything that can be called ‘domesticity’ in the old Latin sense, that which is in the *domus*, like the dogs, for example. (Lyotard 101)

³ I presume that is Lyotard’s translation; actually the word means ‘publicly’, or perhaps in this context ‘as a matter of public concern’ [note from Ralph]

Although he never mentions this, Lyotard's associational logic comes close to thinking about ecology in the same way that eco-feminists and deep ecologists do – that is, as (a) a critique of patriarchal constructions of nature; and (b) an ecosophy which provokes a fundamental rethinking of what it means to be human, and how we should exist on and relate to the earth. In these instances, and despite important ideological differences, ecology is posited as a way of thinking, a *praxis*, that refuses human and non-human exploitation, and importantly, situates that refusal in the most everyday of activities, namely, in how we locate ourselves at home.

As you say, Franc, I think it does raise issues of stewardship, and that of course brings us to a whole host of problems. Stewardship is bound up, for me, with a theological, authoritarian and conservationist logic that I'm reluctant to endorse. I'm still thinking my way through this.... But as ever, I'm trying to tiptoe between giving the non-human world agency and dealing with the fact that nature, including human nature, is something produced through a process of human and mechanical labour (what Marx call metabolism). This brings us to questions of ethics and politics, which no ecology can do without - thinking here of Priscilla's paper or the first 30 minutes of it, and also of course of Bateson and Guattari.

Franc

I brought in some ritual in relation to the bees -- the key essay is probably Turner's 'heretical' piece in *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988), 'Body, Brain, and Culture', where he suggests a biological base for ritual as opposed to the orthodox (at the time) social constructionist view. I don't see 'construction' as opposed to 'nature', people construct things like artworks and identities and cities, as bees construct hives and honey.

Carl

I use the non-human in an attempt to get away from an anthropocentrism that would see world as constructed wholly in human terms (the social constructionist debates of the 90s). So the non-human is a way of stressing the alterity of 'nature', the fact that there is something beyond the human which we ought to recognise, and which, as you say, has created us as a species.

At the same time, I also think that human beings are part of nature, and not outside of it. Haraway's reading of Margulis in *When Species Meet* seems pertinent in this respect – the fact that we share 96% of our DNA with other creatures. So unlike Heidegger and Adorno who both posit nature as something external to human beings, and as such something that we have become increasingly alienated from in a disastrous sense through technology and the spread of instrumentalised reason (the disenchanted logic of the Enlightenment), I start from the assumption that we are nature, and have never become separated from it. This means that I am not interested in what I perceive to be the redemptive theological thinking inherent in Heidegger (in a positive sense) and in Adorno (in a negative). There is no nature to return back to, as far as I am concerned, primarily because we have never left it. I am, of course, willing to admit – and this, for me, is the

core of ecologism as an ideological discourse – that there are ethically and politically good and bad ways of metabolising/producing the nature that we are at once part of, and which also escapes our capacity to dominate and exploit it.

What I'm trying to think through then is an earth that has been metabolised by human production (I find this difficult to deny in the wake of acid rains, pesticides, space exploration, oceanic mining, etc.), while at the same time maintaining its capacity to be other than human.

So rather than a binary opposition, I see the human and non-human relationship in terms of what Marx called “a differentiated unity.” Effectively, it's a dialectic.

The difficulty I have with the attempt to reject anthropocentrism is (a) historical – we have changed the earth; (b) theoretical – I can't see how we can transcend anthropocentrism since we think in language and are always in human history; (c) political – it has a tendency to absolve humans of responsibility for destroying the planet and species depletion. In that respect, it plays into the hands of neo-liberal politics, and could easily result in type of naturalised thinking that we know is replete with dangers (Nazism, eugenics, neo-Darwinism). It is also haunted by the type of misanthropic environmental thinking – eco-fascism – that is willing to sacrifice humans for the planet. Rather like ideas of 'wilderness', I wonder if a fully-fledged biocentrism is actually shot through with anthropocentric assumptions.

So for me, too, there is no real divide. The point is to realise that human and non-human are engaged in a dialectic, and to explore ways of encouraging a non-exploitative relationship with and between both. This ultimately leads to a different concept and practice of production; one which gives up on profit margins and extensive surplus value, and which is open to how nature produces itself and produces us. In other words, I'm interested in productivity which is aware of what it effects and how it is affected. I don't think that ideas of stewardship are necessarily attuned to the dialectic I am attempting to think through, since they tend to posit a theological binary between human and non-human.

All this leads us to the etymology of the *oikos* - which we know is always about 'home economics' in some form or other. The questions here, for me, are (a) what is a home, and where does it end?; (b) what is the division of labour within the home?; and (c) what type of economics are we concerned with?

Ralph

- i) A 'different concept of practice and production': I agree with your general sense above; in terms of theatre/performance, does this also imply an attitude which sees it as more as process than as 'product'? That's in part what I have been arguing in Part 1.
- ii) 'How nature produces itself and us': which again depends on whether/how we let it. I think here for instance of Franc's account in *Sacred Theatre* of how he let himself be taken as a good omen by people engaged in *Theyyam* ritual performance in Kerala (Ganguly 2007: 25–6). He was able to go along with

this, sensing the importance of this for the community's engagement with the event, and give up his plan to go to a different event that night.

This might link with some things I was hinting at in the Beckett section of Part 1, and some others – on the *oikos* issue - which you, Carl, put very well in your essay on working with Simon Whitehead, viz:

“For Heidegger... homecoming is not simply about dwelling in a definite territory; rather, it concerns an interminable dialectic between homelessness and homecoming [...] the heimlich and unheimlich are always imbricated...”;

and you cite Mugeraur saying:

“homecoming... is a continuous becoming 'at home',”

before going on to point out the need to go beyond Heidegger and engage with Deleuze and Guattari's “animal becomings,” in which

humans might overcome the transcendent lure of language and start to perceive themselves as belonging more fully to earth and cosmos as material substance, an entity amongst others. [...] it seems important to look to other art forms, practices and, ultimately, ontologies which... place more emphasis on the materiality of the 'molecular' body, the body that we share with other animals and elements on earth. (Lavery and Whitehead)

I think this picks up much of what we were suggesting earlier.

Is performance, in this perspective, a way of learning this always-becoming, this loss and gain?

In ancient India or Greece, theatre spaces were not, in spite of the oft-cited etymology, just viewing places, but also places sculpted into the contours of the natural world, embedded in a valley or designed to resonate with its acoustic and its alignment, to incorporate in construction the stone and wood, to accept and divert the passage of the wind, to accommodate and deflect the sun and the rain. They were places which were constructed to give access to a different mode of perceiving, and this could only arise from a different mode of being. They moved the perceiver towards something larger, something which was spoken in the sweep of the auditorium and symbolically configured in the apparent circle of its envelope: a contiguity with those forces which operate in nature, to quicken or to destroy, but are also processed in many forms in human experience. The semicircle of the amphitheatre, as Rilke tells us in *Malte*, is an ear: “ein Ohr der Erde” (“an ear of the world” or perhaps better, “a world-ear”). What it hears is not just the representation of the forms of worldly action, played out on the stage; but also, and more profoundly, like a shell held to the ear, a sibillancy which is the “gathering of the world, *over there...*” (beyond the rim). The theatre is the place in which the world performs itself, in this understanding. Its potential – all its latent energies and forms – are

gathered out there beyond the rim and then manifested, incorporated, presented as the action of the world. So theatreing (as I have so often said) is not just a social act, although it is also supremely, wittily, cynically and politically that, but it is also an existential one.

Franco

Yes, I think I understand what you're doing with non-human – I'm trying to think nature as network/web – rhizome if you will – and in that way trying to avoid human/non-human as a binary – and I'm not seeing them as terms in an [Hegelian] dialectic. I could probably use 'post human'. I agree completely that we are nature and have never become separated from it – but there is something else: we have constructed ourselves as separate and that construction is what allows us to take actions could constitute those “bad ways of metabolising nature.” That notion of separateness is an illusion/delusion but has material effects – a return to nature, then, would be a recognition of the illusion/delusion of separateness and of the consequences of that illusion (I thought that both Heidegger and Adorno understood this). We don't disagree that humans are not separate from nature. I'm saying it's as a part of nature that human action creates problems for the network as a whole – and it's as a part of nature that we try to remedy the situation.

I'm also suggesting that the notion of separateness is rooted in an ability to self-consciously reflect (which is a result of living processes). Of course that picks up on a Judeo-Christian mythology, but I would argue that the notion of separateness is to a large extent rooted in that mythology but I am not interpreting it theologically or in terms of Hegel's dialectic of *Geist* (however we want to translate that). There is no teleology, no *deus-ex-machina* to rapture us out of this problem. Ralph's Vedantic perspective [see below] seems to me to be significant here because it bypasses this tradition and offers an alternative viewpoint that doesn't need to get entangled in the briars of western thought – we wear a different set of lenses (but remembering that Ralph's working off decades of practical experience so he knows how to see with these lenses).

Ralph

I'll just say that the aspects of Vedantic thought I am invoking here posit different kinds or degrees of 'separation', from the (distant)/analytical to the (identical) condition of contiguity, equivalence: by which is meant the capacity to operate at the level of origination of form and matter. You may or not accept that this can occur! More importantly, the aesthetic theory of *rasa* – outlined in detail in the *Natya Sastra* – views the cultivation of aesthetic experience via performance as a form of training the sensitivity and awareness to engage increasingly with the whole spectrum. There is also an enormous tradition of scholarship over millennia which explores the implications of this!

Franco

[...] Yes, I thought you'd have a problem with the notion of 'stewardship' – I'm more of a mind to re-claim words, but am aware that they drag their history with them (doesn't *oikos*, somewhere, imply 'husbandry' in its patriarchal Greek form?).

If you lump the world into human and non-human then, it seems to me, the binary creates the problem of agency. There are agents/agencies in the world; some human some non-human (but that 'non-human' is an anthropocentric term which hides the differences). I think it's true to say that human agency is a consequence of non-human agencies (if you can read that in a non-theological manner) – and, when we talk ethics and politics it seems clear that 'human agency' isn't always 'human[e]' (human as species identifier versus human as ethical being). If nature is an autoassemblage of ongoing transformations and autopoieses there is no place outside – 'nature' isn't metabolised/produced by something 'other' (human/machine/spirit) except in anthropocentric discourse. The separation is only ever a conceptual performance in the construction of a nature/culture, human/non-human pattern of binaries. Differences, yes, but differences-in-relationship or differences-in-context.

None of this is to deny the importance of ethics and politics (and those who have to live in polluted habitats).

I don't know if I'm being 'original' – but I'll follow through some of the ideas as best I can. Turner mentions a conference in 1965, I think where there were ethologists and artists and psychiatrists and anthropologists all discussing ritual...

Ralph

In this context I seem to remember Carl raising the notion (according to Clov in *Endgame*) of there being 'no more nature'. Some thoughts:

In terms of the environment predicated in the play, Clov refers to the instrumental readings he reports: zero on the hygrometer, the anemometer and the thermometer; in other words there is no perceptible degree of humidity, wind velocity or temperature. We are, you might say, *nulle part*, nowhere. But why?

Nature ('instinct', our autonomic nervous system; or the universe) is running down/out. But anyway:

What we used to think was 'natural' (self-evident, taken-for-granted, habitual) is now redundant, because we can't do anything 'naturally'.

We think, therefore we perform.

We always observe (spectate) what we do.

We think, therefore we cannot just be.

So performance (an extra-daily, difficult, excessive, luxury-balance mode of activity) actually merely confirms our inevitable condition of unnaturalness, artifice.

We are (and are not) 'nature'. There isn't anywhere else, There is no-one/where-else to pass the buck to. That is how it is. Nature is infected with culture, nature is unnatural. There is no more (unadulterated) nature.

Franz

So, where does performance come in for me? My first move is to assert its biological and communicative basis – that it is itself part of nature and that theatre is part of a continuum rather than something 'exceptional'. I don't think that's a radical claim. At

some point performance becomes self-reflective – and that opens up the possibility of [not]? being used as a means of questioning/investigating our constructions and their consequences – there are different ways of doing this, of course, but the reason why I think Boal is important is that he explicitly engages with this possibility – theatre as a participatory form that enables a community to investigate and reflect on their own circumstances and to explore possibilities for action. The thing about Boal is that working with the body is central – whilst the book *Theatre of the Oppressed* reads like a dated theoretical programme which is to be applied, it's really a narrative of the breakdown of any such programme – the neat, even convenient, readings of Aristotle, Hegel, Machiavelli etc. juxtaposed with romantic fantasies of the dithyramb belonging to the people and rooted in cycles of labour are seriously disrupted by the stories of actual situations – the photograph of the girl brought in answer to the task to take a photograph of 'where I live' (Boal 2000. 124) and the story of Virgilio ("we have guns...", Boal, 1995, 2). Boal is aware of the importance of these moments and his later writings are more pragmatic and rooted and more inclined to a provisional and flexible theorisation – witness the shift in the discussion of catharsis from *Theatre of the Oppressed* to *Rainbow of Desire* [although he maintained his interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Boal identified three other kinds of catharsis (69–74)]. A key aim of Boal's work is to return us to our senses and to get us to start from there. The illusion of separateness and the degrading of our environment can desensitize us in a variety of ways – when we become re-sensitized we can begin to take action. Of course, this raises questions about what we mean by sensitivity and the notions of hypo and hyper-sensitivity (Alexander Berzin has written two very thoughtful books on this from a Buddhist perspective [see Berzin 1998 and 2003]).

'Boal' is a marker here – the point is the activity that his name is associated with. Priscilla's paper was based on the decolonial theory of Mignolo and the situations she described seemed to me to be perfectly suited to the use of Boal-style work. I'm not proposing that Boal tells us more about ecology than, say, Beckett, but that in some situations Boal's approach is more useful for environmental activism and social justice than Beckett.

In a sense Boal's techniques/methods are an intermediate technology but they also offer possibilities that go beyond the sclerotic norms of corporate politics that masquerade as 'democracy' in the richest countries.

Sheets-Johnstone argued that Haraway's aim wasn't to "understand the body" but "to catapult it into language" (Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Power* 65). Gendlin says (193) that "the body knows language" – in other words the body isn't separate from language nor is it some kind of blank page on which language is inscribed – it isn't any kind of passive victim of language, but generates language (where else does language come from if we want to avoid any kind of linguistic idealism?).

But there is something else uncomfortable in my thinking – it doesn't allow that any one ideology is 'more natural' than any other, they are all human creations. It does, however, allow for the fact that some ideologies are more destructive than others and

cause more pain, harm, and suffering to the world and may, ultimately, destroy the world in the way that cancer cells destroy the organism of which they are a part. So I'd want to consider ideologies in relation to notions of ecological health – but that's not unproblematic (as ecological health itself requires judgements based on values which may derive from a particular ideology – but I can live with that).

Ralph

I am with you here. Boal here. Forum Theatre sees action and reflection as natural facets of 'performance' and this generates “provisional and flexible theorisation”; so performance becomes a praxis as well as a practice; it “returns us to our senses.” It's also a key mode of literacy (Freire) – relating to what Priscilla discussed under the heading of 'decolonisation'.

The location of this practice in 'communities' (bearing in mind the highly contested meaning of that term) is important and performative as an ecology – cf. Ganguly/Jana Sanskriti: he considers his practice to be a way both of generating 'rational collective action' – as a result of experiencing, reflecting on and intervening in a performance of relevance to and constructed in tandem with representatives of the social sphere in which it occurs – and of strengthening aesthetic and political awareness (Ganguly 2010).

On another note, I found this on Goethe yesterday:

his ideas of transformation were about the continuous metamorphosis of living things... Goethe formulated a theory of plant metamorphosis in which the archetypal form of the plant is to be found in the leaf – he writes, "from top to bottom a plant is all leaf, united so inseparably with the future bud that one cannot be imagined without the other." (Wikipedia)

“*Gestaltend umgestaltend*” is how he puts it in one late poem, which is a kind of double gerund which attempts linguistically to perform the ongoing process of transformation.

Maybe bio-ritual might be about trying to get into it physically? I would be interested to hear more about that.

Steamy greetings from the near-monsoon.

Carl

I'm certainly with you on the idea of responding to the anthropogenic causes of pollution, global warming, species depletion - that's what my last email was about. But I also don't want to rule out that there are non-human forces and processes that are productive as well. Evolution, as Franc suggested, being one of those. So while I want to hold humans responsible, I also want to temper human exceptionalism, which I think lies behind ideas of stewardship. That's certainly in Heidegger, for instance, when he talks about poetry and sparing.

I like the Goethe quote, particularly if we see it in terms of becomings which I attracted to, but I also want to trouble it by highlighting the danger in thinking about human society in terms of natural processes... there are other factors at stake (language, desire, sexuality, will to power, ethics, etc.), and again with this, I think such analogies can be catastrophic and naturalising. And yet, at the same, I also want to think machinically of the bird or wind that carried the seed of the plant, of the bee that pollinated it, of the soil that it grew in, of the sunlight that it need to grow, of the shade that it gives to human animals...to use a term from Haraway, so many infoldings and networks behind this archetype.

Ralph

For me the performance angle is about attempting a 'deeper' 'relationship' (/symbiosis?). Indian philosophy suggests we perceive and construct whatever we think is 'out there' – but which is of course not entirely or even not principally so – in (at least) six different modes which range from the discriminatory (Sankhya) to the virtually identical (Vedanta). Six – and probably any categorisation – is of course arbitrary. The point is that there are different degrees of what I call subtlety (but that might also be an idealisation or unduly reverential appellation). Moving through them, juxtaposing them, giving them equal weight, as physical and psychological process, is what I am working with in trying to see how performance and ecology interpenetrate.

I don't think Goethe was applying natural process to human society in that phrase or in his morphology. He was trying to find what he thought were patterns common to both because as an artist he was both constructing and interrogating processes (and as a fairly 'classical' scientist proceeding by observation and categorisation, whilst at the same time aware that he was a part of what was being observed and categorised). He was also highly ironic about e.g. Faust's attempts to reorganise environments both human and non-human.

Carl

yes....can see the Goethe point, and as I said I'm very attracted to ecological approaches to theatre itself. Can we see it in terms of open and/or closed systems, or as a combination? Or as a space of contact, in which we might be transformed through our experience of a new environment? I'm just trying to trouble my own thinking, to think about its stakes.... Keep well in India. Been dealing with floods in Aberystwyth.

Franc

I think we've started to think about the complexity of what might constitute an ecology of the theatre. I don't think that we've ignored the text, but we haven't reduced theatre ecology to an eco-critical reading of canonical texts. By trying to address a broad spectrum of performances and theories of performance, I think that we've created a

number of problems for ourselves but I also think that those problems are important. I didn't begin by thinking my contribution in relation to Guattari's three ecologies, but it seems to me that would be useful to do in the future.

We've questioned the nature/culture binary which would keep the two separate, and we've tried to come up with different ways of addressing that. What we have done, I think, is challenge the idea that human beings, and by extension theatre, are in some way separate from nature and the animal.

Where I'd like to go next is to re-think my practice. What's the ecology of my theatre work? The teaching, facilitating, directing, acting? Does it contribute to a critical and practical engagement with matters which have a bearing on the current environmental situation? Or does it plaster over the cracks or worse?

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