

## **Proposals for a dialogue between performative arts and contemplative traditions**

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### **Abstract**

In this article, I address the challenges that the word 'contemplation' has faced in modernity, particularly in the performing arts, where it has often come to designate a 'merely passive' attitude on the part of the spectator experiencing a performance. At the same time, I identify a relatively recent interest among artists and researchers in contemplative practices, with specific reference to forms of Buddhist meditation as a means of developing attention and perception. I defend a deeper study of traditional references based on my experience as a lay practitioner of Theravada Buddhism, drawing attention to the distortion and dilution present in contemporary culture. Procedures and exercises are proposed inspired by these practices, taking into consideration experiences and academic research developed in Brazil, with the education of the Western stage actor in mind.

### **Keywords**

contemplation, Buddhism, theatre, performer, attention, perception, training.

## Contemplation reconsidered

In recent years there has been a growing interest among performers, researchers and students, in practices such as yoga, martial arts and meditative practices, with a view to working on the qualities of attention, perception, presence, energy, calm, readiness, and other terms generally associated with such techniques. Although the study of Eastern theatre traditions in the West - such as *Noh*, *Kathakali*, *Beijing Opera* and *Balinese Theatre* - already has a considerable history leading back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this relatively new phenomenon has something to say about the search among artists for exercises that are not specifically related to theatre. Faced with the diversity of languages that characterises contemporary theatre, some researchers and artists today appear to be particularly interested in the training of perception and presence and in the “pre-expressive” dimension of the artistic experience.<sup>1</sup>

Two recent examples which attest to this trend are encounters organised by Huddersfield University in the UK, and by the *Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*, both of which took place in 2016. With artists and researchers representing nine countries, the symposium in Huddersfield was organised around the theme of “Performance and Mindfulness”, encompassing a plurality of approaches including Buddhist meditation, yoga, martial arts such as aikido, and traditional Mexican practices among others. The term ‘mindfulness’ was employed in a broad sense, applied to the work of refining attention which could be based on different strategies and propositions, with Buddhist meditation serving as an important reference. The event which took place in Rio de Janeiro - *Artes da Cena e Práticas Contemplativas* - could almost be considered a continuation of the meeting in Huddersfield, and included the participation of two of the coordinators of the UK symposium.<sup>2</sup> The choice of the term “contemplation” as the title of the meeting was a subject for discussion throughout and deserves some comment here.

In the context of traditional Buddhism, in particular the Theravada school, based on canonical *Pali* texts, contemplation can be understood as the translation of the word *anupassana*, which literally means ‘seeing’ (*passana*) ‘closely’ and ‘repeatedly’ (*anu*). The deep sustained and repeated observation of a phenomenon may lead the practitioner to moments of insight (*vipassana*) about impermanence (*anicca*), the diverse forms of suffering (*dukkha*) and the absence of the permanent ego (*anatta*). The development of the direct comprehension of body-mind phenomena lies at the heart of Buddhist practice, identified with wisdom capable of freeing the mind from its fetters. Even though artistic practice does not necessarily have the same purpose, it can come close to this kind of exercise, helping us to understand the creative process from another perspective.

We are not dealing with something absolutely new here. In a general sense, important directors and artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Brecht, Meyerhold and Artaud, demanded that the actor develop a type of ‘internal spectator’. The ability to bear silent witness to one’s own actions could be considered a fundamental quality to be developed in this art. In this sense, a ‘good internal gaze’ is one which is neither excessively critical or inhibiting, nor condescending or narcissistic. It is a specific modality of attention capable of evaluating and refining the quality of actions.

Grotowski, in his text 'Performer' (1993), approached this double aspect of training, making use of the Hindu image of two birds: one is watchful, while the other feeds. If the desire is to become a complete artist, the performer must know how to draw on both points of view. A focus on the 'bird that feeds' can easily be related to the more 'exterior' aspect of training, directed at work on the body, the voice and the composition of actions. But what does it mean to focus on the watchful bird? What is presupposed here is that the contemplative capacity of the performer can indeed be cultivated and developed.

In this sense, looking to traditional Eastern arts may be of great worth. Many of them have preserved a clear connection with contemplative practices in terms of the fundamental dimension of the artist's work. Japanese researcher Yuasa Yasuo (1987) demonstrates how the practice of *waka* poetry and *Noh* theatre are founded on the Buddhist notion of *shugyo*, which could be translated as *cultivation*. Art, in these cases, is considered as a path towards the realisation of the deep possibilities of human beings, of freedom from conditioning and automatism, and of achieving higher levels of consciousness. By means of specific processes and languages, theatre and poetry become 'vehicles' - to borrow Grotowski's term - that the artist can use to work on the self, and that are capable of producing subtle resonances in the spectator and in the space.

Beyond the specifics of each artistic form, they are all founded in work on the qualities of attention and perception, taking shape in diverse forms of action and communication. This quality should be present in any staged action or in the very exercise of the chosen language (poetry, painting), but, at times, the practice of meditation itself is recommended. In *Noh* theatre, for instance, the practice of *zazen* (seated meditation) is stimulated as training of the 'spirit', along with other exercises, such as the study of plays, songs and dances. Without doubt, simply 'being seated' is already a form of extremely subtle and concentrated action, propitious for contemplation and for discerning smaller perceptions and movements of the mind. As stated by Zeami, the artist must cultivate a state of 'observing with a detached seeing' and 'observing with the same mind as one observing from the audience' (*apud* YUASA, 1987, p.108).

To add to the examples of relationships between contemplative practices and traditional artistic training in the East, in a text on classical Indian aesthetics, Umberto Eco, citing one of Vedanta's scholars, Olivier Lacombe, brings the following consideration to light:

in supplying artists with canonical rules capable of realising the artistic end, the various treatises of aesthetics are continual reminders that the artist has to apply the methods of self-communion typical of yoga, since it is in the purified and rectified spirit that one can produce that generative intuition, without which technical ability will remain sterile. (Eco, 2016, p.64)

It is certainly necessary to deepen our understanding of the terms 'purification' and 'rectification' within the Indian context, given that these are notions that might arouse superficial and exclusively 'moral' interpretations. But what interests us here is to underline this articulation between contemplation and artistic creation. For Eco, there is not an opposition between the terms, but rather a necessary harmony which impedes the sterilisation of art and its reduction to merely technical or formal procedures. Meditation makes the artistic process breathe,

introducing subtlety to perceptions and freeing the artist from deep-rooted conditioning.

Contemplative exercises provide a form for the actor to develop perceptive abilities and recognise their automatisms, opening up space for discovering a more vivid and conscious relationship with external and internal events. Even those actions that are more expansive and in movement may carry with them a contemplative quality in the extent to which they are perceived more closely and impersonally. According to the traditional Buddhist definition, contemplation (*anupassana*) is an exercise of refining perception, in which we investigate the tendency to hold on to an image of self. Action and contemplation are interwoven, as if the actor and the spectator exist at the same time within the same person.

In the traditional Eastern context, the articulation between action and contemplation is also developed through the learning of a codified aesthetic language, such as the *katas* in *Noh* theatre, for example. The conscious repetition of patterns of movement is a form of exercising the attention, making possible increasingly finely tuned apprehension of the process. After a long period of training, the artist is capable of experiencing an overcoming of the form, penetrating deeply into its subjacent energy.

However, for the contemporary Western actor, this path is not always available, as it demands dedication to a style from a young age. Our cultural and social conditions are highly distinct, marked by a plurality of influences and professional demands that call for a certain eclecticism. Perhaps this explains why some Western artists are interested in contemplative practices *sensu stricto*, such as, for example, the forms of meditation encountered in Buddhist traditions. Based on the training of the attention and perception it would be possible to bring these abilities to artistic languages which are *a priori* uncoded. The intention would be to impregnate performative action with a contemplative quality. One of the challenges here is that of establishing consistent training so that such qualities of awareness may effectively blossom, without distortions.

### **Studying traditional references**

The study of traditional references related to contemplative exercise is therefore an important aspect of this type of research today. The choice of the word 'contemplation' as a means of approaching proposed artistic problems has the advantage of connecting Western and Eastern traditions. As is well-known, this concept has a strong presence in religious and philosophical thinking in Greco-Roman antiquity. The Latin word *contemplatio* can be translated as 'to gaze attentively' or 'to mark out a space of observation', equivalent to the Greek term *theoria*. Circumscribing a special space for the exercise of observation brings us the relationship between contemplation and the idea of a 'temple'. It is also worth noting the proximity of the word 'theatre', to the Greek *theatron*, which literally means 'place for viewing'.

As Arendt (1958) shows us, contemplation was held in high regard in antiquity, and was considered the culmination of the development of human faculties, capable of serving as a guide and reference across a range of aspects of active life. This was more than an isolated practice, it was a form of life (*bios*) - attained through reflection, carrying out specific exercises, and through a certain mode of existence - all of which allowed wisdom and long-lasting happiness (*eudaimonia*) to blossom. In modernity, the sense of this experience was

progressively obscured, and it came to be understood as 'theory' in the sense of an exclusively rational activity, distinct from practice. The non-discursive and non-conceptual aspect of contemplation identified as an act of 'seeing in an accurate way', was gradually lost. According to Arendt, there has in fact been an inversion of the ancient hierarchy of ways of living, since certain forms of active life, in particular activities related to production and consumption, have come to take on inordinate importance in contemporary life.

Authors including Foucault (2001), Hadot (2002) and Sloterdijk (2013), reveal, in greater detail, how contemplative life in the philosophical schools of antiquity was based on a way of life, an ethic and on 'spiritual exercises' practiced by participants of different schools. That which was considered true life was achieved by means of some type of *askesis* which was capable of modifying habits and opening up to new levels of consciousness. Philosophy here could be better understood as an 'art of existence' rather than the pursuit of constructing systems of thought. In this sense, it was closer to the idea of 'spirituality' - the practitioner's search for a transformative experience, an ontological transformation.

If we seek to establish relationships between such experiences and the field of the education and training of the performer, it is fundamental that we look to traditions in which these processes are still living. The question of exercises and practice is essential both to the notion of spirituality that we are proposing, and as part of creative processes in theatre. This implies more than just rational comprehension, it implies engagement in procedures that act on and modify our habits and our everyday lives. Some traditions, such as Buddhism, know how to preserve the various elements that constitute this type of path. Furthermore, today, in the West, there are representatives of the great Buddhist lineages (*Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana*) and this wisdom has had considerable impact on scientific, philosophical and artistic fields, all of which may aid us in our theoretical and experiential understanding of the subject.

In parallel, we see that today, there is a vast diffusion of information on a range of types of meditation, not all of which is reliable. The transformation of meditation into a mere 'technique' for attending to pains, anxieties, and conflicts, which, at the same time, make the individual more productive and adaptable to the demands of the world today, appear to us to be a serious distortion of the deeper proposals of contemplative practice. For performative arts to be able to engage in a deeper dialogue with these sources, there is a need for both the study of traditional references, and an opening up to new forms of scientific and philosophical knowledge that are active in the integration of this understanding, taking into account the specific demands of our age.

### **Theatrical practice and the specific place of meditation**

My contribution here is tied to my experience as a lay practitioner in the Theravada tradition and based on what I have experienced and learned with masters of this lineage.<sup>3</sup> I believe it to be of great importance to establish propitious initial conditions for the development of practice and its relationship with a broader horizon of contemplation. I understand that artists and students may practice meditation at different levels without the need for them to become Buddhists or to observe some sort of religious commitment. This is one of the

reasons why Buddhist meditation has earned so much support in the West. Even within the parameters of an ethic and in the context of secular culture, meditation may bring important benefits. However, the foundations of practice and the understanding of its purpose must be well-established, so that those who practice may, in time, broaden the horizons of experience.<sup>4</sup>

As artists, we have to work on the idea that practice should not be considered as yet another technique for actuation. This point is essential given the current trend for the instrumental use of traditional wisdom, based on a kind of distortion of its purpose. It is impossible to create a fertile space for meditation if we have already filled it with a series of desires, related to success, approval, and gains, etc. Even if the individual has developed a sophisticated perspective on what they intend to do with a technique, it is necessary to elaborate with care the intention behind the practice. One way of approaching this theme is to reflect on the traditional expression, 'take refuge'. When we meditate, we wish to develop certain qualities of mind through the teachings (*dhamma*) of Buddha and from more experienced practitioners (*sangha*). This means that our intention is to calm the body-mind to investigate the phenomena that ceaselessly appear and disappear. If we have other objectives, we will not create the conditions required for such an investigation.

In other words, we have to create a 'liminal space', within artistic training itself. The concept of liminality was developed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1982), in his study of the ritual processes in various traditional contexts. The first stage of the rites is precisely that of separating from everyday customs in order to constitute a special space-time, one not governed by the usual 'profane' purposes and intentions. The liminal space is not solely physical. Clearly the constitution of a favourable space would be the first step towards creating an analogous mental disposition. In traditional contexts, liminality signifies the suspension of typical behaviour and an entering into a 'sacred' space of training and self-modification.

But what does it mean to create a radically liminal dimension in the field of theatrical creation? One way would be to propose the practice of meditation as a special exercise, distinct from other forms of training. In a certain sense, one must 'meditate without instrumental aims', without desires to produce materials, scenes, attain approval, gains, etc. That is, the constitution of a mental space in which phenomena can appear-disappear with clarity in order to be perceived and worked with. Meditation can be seen as a species of 'non-action' linked to the creation of an initial situation; a place in which the 'theatre of the mind' may be studied. In a second phase, the theatre itself becomes a *theatron*, in the ancient sense of the term - a 'place for viewing'.

As such, the care taken with the physical space may establish a transition between meditative exercise and theatrical practice. In training linked to traditional Eastern theatre and martial arts, the cleansing of the space by the practitioners, accompanied by a certain ritualisation of behaviour, is used as a device for intensifying attention. This is also a form of drawing the actor's ego out from the centre of the scene, positioning it in such a way that it is at the service of the construction of a significant situation, offered both to the public and to the self.

The conventions that govern the functioning of a group and define the commitment required for work to be effective, help to create a founding relational

base, prior to the events that occur during the process of creating scenes themselves. Work in collectives represents a field of learning and the development of an ethic without which it would be impossible to achieve the subtle results of the artistic process. Here, attention to details is decisive. The responsibilities of each individual in terms of themselves and the other, the comprehension of the meaning of those differences, the clear establishment of limits, apt use of the word and of silence, all of this is built into a vast field of training and we must maintain an awareness of this. Sculpting a healthy relational space generates the trust that allows for the blossoming of deeper experiences.

### **Sati and the quality of attention**

Another aspect fundamental to the practice of meditation pertains to our understanding of the word 'attention' and the customs related to it. In general, in Western theatrical training the problem of attention occupies an important place, and is viewed as a quality to be developed by the actor in the construction of psychophysical actions. Yet, contemplative practices provide us with another dimension in terms of attention. The word 'mindfulness' is commonly used to designate a type of capacity involved in Buddhist meditative practices, but adapted to a Western context. In this there is an attempt to translate into English the term *sati*, used in Buddha's discourses, which were delivered in *Pali*. As we know, mindfulness has garnered popularity in diverse currents and has been accepted as one possible translation. However, if we return to canonical *Pali* texts and certain commentators, we arrive at a broader and more complex idea of the semantic field that this concept encompasses. This type of study is useful in the extent to which it may provide support to more consistent practice.

The term *sati* is central in the teachings of the *dhamma* and is the subject of many of Buddha's discourses. Here we will make use of a study carried out by the monk Anālayo (2014), professor at Hamburg University, on a particularly important subject, the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, or the *Discourse on the Four Foundations of sati*. Delivered to an audience made up of lay-practitioners and monks, the *sutta* presents a series of paths and skilful means of firmly establishing the quality of *sati* in the mind, as a support for the flowering of wisdom (*pañña*) and to assist in freeing the mind from conditioning. Naturally, the scope of this theme far outstretches the finalities of this article, and so we will limit ourselves to beginning a discussion about the quality of attention required and developed in meditation and possible questions that may arise in relation to the work of the actor.

The Pali language has a specific term to express the idea of 'attention' in its more generally accepted form: *manasikara*. The most simple cognitive acts involve some degree of attention, defined as 'the mental factor responsible for the mind's advertence to the object, by virtue of which, the object is made present to consciousness', (Bodhi, 1999, p. 81). Attention is a mental factor which is considered universal, present as a basic cognitive function and neutral from the point of view of ethics. Thieves adopt a certain type of attention in order to achieve their goals, animals engage a certain type of attention when hunting, and so on. The notion of *sati* belongs to a category of healthy mental factors or 'beautiful factors'<sup>5</sup>, linked, therefore, to the cultivation of qualities that are required along

the path. This is a special form of attention which allows wisdom to bloom (*yoniso manasikara*).

*Sati* is related to a special type of memory. This is not an awareness of past facts, but of remembering the need to maintain oneself attentive to the present moment. This reminder serves to potentially resist the untrained mind's constant tendency to become caught up in anxieties connected to the past and to the future. This does not mean that we ought to deny ourselves careful reflection on issues we have inherited, or that we should not plan our next steps, without exaggerated expectations. Instead, in this exercise we should recognise the moments in which we are possessed by such preoccupations and lose touch with the acute perception of the present instance and its potential. When energy is dispersed within the mental tangle of past and future, it could be said that we disconnect from events.

*Sati* also signifies nourishing the memory with the superior possibilities of the mind, with its intrinsic capacity to attain states of profound freedom, serenity and compassion. Traditionally, this becomes possible in remembrance of the qualities of a Buddha. Here, the term 'Buddha' does not only refer to the historical character of the prince Siddhartha who realised the path to emancipation. It also refers to the possibility every human being has to 'awaken' if the mind is wisely cultivated. In this sense, the development of attention directed at specific phenomena that occur from moment to moment incorporates a broader purpose: obtaining deep states of awareness and freedom from suffering. Such reminders prevent this practice from becoming lost in details that are irrelevant from the point of view of the path.

A reference to the meaning of Buddhist realisation also provides criteria for considering the possibilities for the development and realisation of the human mind. It may also serve as a foundation for evaluating the qualities and transformations of a character we are working on in a play. When Aristotle defined tragedy as *mimesis* of the acts of noble men, he was not only referring to the social condition of kings, queens, princes and warriors. He was also referring to 'spiritual nobility', the heroic *ethos* of the tragic character who reveals the human condition when faced with forces that transcend it. Even in error, the tragic hero may become aware of their responsibility when faced with a 'fate' which repeats and becomes amplified in a vicious circle of suffering. Buddha is a symbol of the radical awareness of this process and of successfully overcoming it. He supplies us with a perspective for comprehending the type of entanglement and illusion that we often elaborate in artistic work.

Another important feature worthy of consideration is the distinction between two different moments during the process of meditation. The first lies in the serene observation of that which emerges, without recourse to automatic response. This is a 'dismantling' of the perceptive process itself, of the tendencies to attach to and/or reject determined experiences. In order for this to occur, one must develop a type of non-identification with mental phenomena, experiencing them more as impersonal processes than products of the 'self'. Through gradual training, the practitioner refines the ability to discern the qualities of the states experienced, creating resources with which, in a second moment, they can actively engage with them:

The need to distinguish clearly between a first stage of observation and a second stage of taken action is, according to the Buddha, an essential



feature of his way of teaching. The simple reason for this approach is that only the primary step of calmly assessing a situation without immediately reacting enables one to undertake the appropriate action. (Anālayo, 2014, 57)

In actor training, the practitioner has to be aware of their automatic reactions. The quality of the action depends on the nature of the attention.

### **Observations on the contemplation of the body in the *Satipatthāna Sutta***

To firmly establish the *sati* as a mental quality, the practitioner can make use of different objects of contemplation: the physical body (*kaya*), the sensations (*vedanas*), states of mind (*cittas*) and the *dhammas*, or groups of mental phenomena, the investigation of which is especially important for development along the path. There is no prescribed order to the practice. Any one of these themes may serve as an entrance. Admittedly, however, it is easier to begin with more concrete, tangible phenomena, such as the body, in order to later engage in the contemplation of more subtle experiences.

I also believe that the body is a particularly appropriate theme for stage actors. They commonly have a certain familiarity with work with the body, based on developing attention through techniques such as somatic education, for instance. It is necessary to emphasise that contemplative traditions work with other notions of body-mind and have other purposes. In Buddhism, great emphasis is placed on the development of the impersonal observation of the impermanence of bodily processes which includes confronting aging, sickness and death. This perspective intends to create a more mature and realistic relationship with temporal reality. In an age in which the body has become an object of intense cultural investment, providing support to a series of idealisations and illusions, such work takes on great importance. Theatre can provide a space in contemporary culture in which questions about the finitude and impermanence of the body-mind can be subjected to radical investigation and contemplation.

Breathing is considered one of the privileged forms of developing a finer perception of the experience of body and mind. In the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, it is the first of six topics that compose the contemplation of the body.<sup>6</sup> Contemplating breathing involves overcoming the common mental 'representation' that we have of what breathing is. Over time, we create a mechanical image of the process of taking in and releasing air from 'our' body. If we stop there, then the perception of breathing becomes a mundane and automatic activity. Contemplation, however, is a non-conceptual activity, linked to the development of a quality of attention. It is necessary to 'not know' what breathing is to be able to observe it more acutely. If the mind is sufficiently stable, and the body calm, perhaps we can discover it there in deep impulses of the living body, mobilising sensations and energies that circulate throughout the body. We may also perceive more acutely how, in the simple act of breathing, there may be subtle tension present that creates certain anxiety and stress. Steadying the breathing calms the body and mind, creating conditions for a heightened awareness of micro-perceptions and the apprehension of insights.

Contemplation of the body in Buddhism may lead to a radical perception of the impermanence of processes and experiences, aiding in undoing a "solid" image

which we create of ourselves. This crystallised representation of corporeal reality often carries with it a reactive aspect, in the extent to which we have difficulty dealing with the passing of time and finitude. Other topics in the contemplation of the body involve investigations into aspects which are not always agreeable and 'beautiful', such as processes within the internal organism (organs, bones and so on) or processes of decay and degeneration. These are topics explored by more experienced meditators as they may give rise to strong emotional reactions. That said, it is important that we appreciate that Buddhism works with a progressive detachment from corporeality (and also from mental phenomena), not because this feeds a negative relationship with the body, but in order to invest in a mature attitude in confronting impermanence and in the cultivation of a more permanent and deeper sense of contentment.

### **Some practical applications in theatre**

In the research that we have begun at the *Universidade Estadual de Campinas*<sup>7</sup>, we have been working on the idea that the practice of seated meditation, established in accordance with the principles discussed here, can be taken up as a type of foundational exercise, or an empty centre, around which the artistic work may be built. When we are 'just sitting' we suspend our desires to attain, or to be this, that, or the other. We refine our concentration and attention in order to contemplate what appears and disappears in the mental space we create. We may also cultivate and strengthen states of consciousness that are more subtle and free from conditioning.

For actors and performers it is especially interesting to take up the practice of attention to breathing in different postures and during different activities. The contemplation present in action and movement is introduced little by little, in such a way that the person does not lose the quality of consciousness that they acquired in seated meditation. There are diverse forms of practicing meditation within different Buddhist traditions. The *asanas* of Yoga are also a way of exploring the relationships between posture and breathing. In any case, these procedures do not yet refer to a staged context, and may be practiced as forms of investigating body-mind relationships and refining the qualities of attentive awareness.

The subsequent transition to the stage should then involve both a circumscription and a degree of care taken with the place of work. Just as we create a mental space in meditation, we may also develop this practice in terms of the physical space. As has been said, the 'ritual' cleansing of the space, as occurs in some martial arts, becomes an interesting device in this sense. The intention is to underline what the theatre is, before anything happens - a 'place' in which we can focus our attention to contemplate that which often remains hidden in the everyday. We must build this empty space with care so that every small occurrence becomes perceptible, as if seen through a microscope.

Specific exercises in Noh theatre, such as *kamai* (standing posture) or *suriachi* (walking, sliding the feet along the ground), involve an acute quality of attention focussed on simple actions. The perception of postures and movements in relation to the space, and rhythms and duration, are also aspects that are fundamental to the training. Stylisation of movement, typical of Noh, has particular qualities of anatomy and energy. This can be apprehended by the practitioner

and later recreated in other languages. What is paramount is the quality of the attention invested in each small action, making the training a highly refined field for investigation into body-mind relationships.

Following the practice of attention to the physical aspects and sensations present in simple exercises, other elements may be added, such as mental images, short texts, and songs, in the composition of actions. Sustaining attention in more complex situations becomes a new challenge. One device that has proven highly useful in this sense is an alternation between those who do, and those who observe: the development of attention on the self, together with the capacity to observe the other. We have also attempted to value observation as a form of action and highlight the importance of the space created between the performer and the public in terms of the *locus* of the theatrical event.

Recently, I have been exploring a form of practice that I call 'diaries of awareness'. I propose that the students keep a diary every day in which they write about some observations that they make during waking or dream life. This practice is related to the refining of perceptions, of interruptions to automatism in everyday tasks. We discuss strategies for creating these moments and form of recording them. As a reference, I have been using the travel diaries of Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashô (1966), who during his long pilgrimages produced diaries, interweaving prose and *haikus*. For the students this exercise can generate material as part of the creative process and this is one way of connecting art with daily life.

These are a few of the strategies we are exploring along with students and other interested professors. Beyond being a form of training specific to a scene, the intention is to work on the idea that life itself constitutes the primordial material of the artist and any given situation may be taken as an extraordinary opportunity to learn more about the world and about oneself. The end purpose of this learning process is the qualitative transformation of ways of being and acting, attuning art to an ethical-political perspective and relating it to fundamental spiritual questions of our time.

To conclude, I believe that humility when faced with such an important and complex subject is a fundamental attitude for the artists and researchers who take this path. In the end, we are dealing with living traditions, some of which have existed for 2,500 years, and have taken on an extremely important role in the history of humanity. As such, I think that art is another vehicle, "a skilful means", which can bring people today closer to the themes and practices that we consider urgent and necessary, and which, at times, goes beyond the reaches of our professional fields. In this, we must commit ourselves to the best of our intelligence and our heart.

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<sup>1</sup> In terms of the concept of “pre-expressivity”, see Barba (1991).

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Deborah Middleton (University of Huddersfield) and Dr. Daniel Reis Plá (*Universidade Federal de Santa Maria*).

<sup>3</sup> In 1991, together with Arthur Shaker and Cristina Floria, I helped to found a lay centre for Theravada meditation in the city of São Paulo, called *Casa de Dharma*. The centre continues activities today, developing retreats and activities with monks and masters in this tradition, linked to monasteries in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. I owe to *Casa de Dharma* and to monks and masters such as Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, Bhante Rahula and Bhante Buddharakita, among many others, my learning and engagement in Buddhist practice.

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<sup>4</sup> An excellent introduction to meditation in Theravada Buddhism can be found in Gunaratana (1991).

<sup>5</sup> In the treatise entitled *Abhidhamma*, pertaining to the Theravada canon, the mental factors that constitute experience are divided into 4 general categories: universal, occasional, unwholesome and beautiful factors. For a more detailed discussion see Bodhi (1999).

<sup>6</sup> The six topics that compose the contemplation of the body in the *satipatthāna sutta* are: breathing, the four postures, a clear understanding of everyday activities, the 32 anatomical parts, the 4 elementary qualities and the 9 stages of decomposition of the corpse.

<sup>7</sup> We are beginning research into the development of attention and perception in the work of the stage actor, establishing interconnections with contemplative practices, exercises from Noh theatre and studies made by researchers and artists from the West dedicated to this theme. In addition to Master's and PhD students we also collaborate with Ângela Nagai, a *Noh* theatre actress, and one of the founders of the *Associação Brasileira de Noh* (ABN). These discussions have been exchanged with other Brazilian centres and researchers.