



## **Editorial: Spacious Mind for Intense Times**

***Deborah Middleton, Daniel Plá***

In Mudra Space Awareness, the form created by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche for theatre makers, participants explore an experience of 'intensification' -

In order to learn to relate with space, we have to learn to intensify the body and build intensive situations as much as possible [...] Very strange to say, in order to learn how to relax, you have to develop really solid tenseness [...] In order to relate with space, you have to relate with tension (Trungpa in Midal, 2012/2001: 194).

In the exercises of Mudra Space Awareness, the participant learns - through the body - how to deal with intense experience, both inner and outer. Intensification becomes, in a way, one's ally. It strikes us (the editors) that the Covid-19 pandemic has been a great and tragic intensifier - crystallizing and making clear multiple personal, social, and global situations that require our urgent and caring attention. Those situations, and the pandemic itself, call upon us to intensify our own practices as the foundations, and the energy sources, from which to respond, and with which to offer perspective and skillful means to others.

Anna Tzakou's book review of Lee Worley's *Teaching Presence: Field Notes for Players* (2018) recognises in Worley's work a wealth of accessible exercises by which we can explore and share meditational awareness with others. Worley is a long-time teacher of Mudra Space Awareness, and a pioneer, through her founding of the Naropa Theater Programme, of Contemplative Performance, but this book brings her deep experience to the service of non-actors, inviting all to be 'students of presence' (Worley, 2018: 15).

In this slender issue we also include a book review of Nicolás Núñez's new and greatly expanded edition of *Anthropocosmic Theatre*. Antonio Prieto Stambaugh's review looks back over Núñez's long history as a theatre maker and psychophysical practitioner, reflecting on the 'life-changing' potential of performance events that serve as 'a kind of healing ritual'. In

his now 45 years of running thrice-weekly open workshops of the Taller de Investigación Teatral, Núñez too offers us a model for how deep experience at the interstices of theatre and meditation can be shaped into powerful somatic practices for the benefit of all.

This has been a year in which illness and death have predominated. In a world characterised by the Buddha as a realm of suffering, we saw worldwide a tide of grief - for lives taken too soon, for loss and isolation and loneliness. In this issue, we also, sadly, include a Tribute to a great elder of our theatre tribe - Phillip Zarrilli - whose life and work stand as exemplars for the field of mindfulness and performance. Phillip was a founding member of our advisory board and he will be much missed. Our Tribute responds, though, to the celebratory tone - forged on an equanimity and bright energy born of deep practice - with which he took his leave of us.

In a year in which theatre and performance academics all over the world were caught up in a flurry of moving their intrinsically live teaching online, this journal received far fewer submissions than usual. Our colleagues and prospective authors reported even longer work days than is usual in our field as they sought to teach through digital means and to reimagine theatre's role in a world of enforced restrictions. We salute and commend the efforts of our academic tribe, and give a deep bow to the myriad freelance artists and professional companies who saw their livelihoods shut down and swallowed up by uncertainty. There is much work to be done in response to this intense and challenging year - the work of reconnecting, rebuilding, reimagining; the work of creating and holding space for grief, for healing, for hope.

In Brazil, the foundations for such a work are being laid through the activities of Tradere, a group led by one of us (Daniel Plá). What would have been an in-person academic conference in Santa Maria this year was forced into digital space by the pandemic. There, Daniel and his gang of accomplices transformed it into a new model for connection and shared practice with the establishment of 'hubs' in Brazil, the USA and Europe from which contemplative performance practice can resonate out to both local and global communities. Through the hubs, the Tradere group gathered together colleagues from four Brazilian universities and from three universities in the UK and USA, and made contact with

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practitioners and scholars from all regions of Brazil and from the USA, Germany, UK, Nepal, India, Australia, Argentina, and Chile. It is heartening to see such a groundswell of collegiality and mutual exchange in the spirit of supporting those central tenets of our field: presence, awareness, equanimity, love.

Many of the practitioners and academics involved in the Tradere project will be presenting their work at a free online symposium scheduled for early May 2021. A call for proposals will be published in January 2021, and we offer an open invitation to all to participate as presenter or attendee. For further information, please contact Daniel Plá at dreispla@gmail.com.

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind you of our open Call for Papers for our Special Issue on Improvisation and Mindfulness (Volume 4, Issue 1) to be published during 2021; submissions are welcome until the final deadline of 30 June 2021. General submissions are also invited for Volume 4, Issue 2, an unthemed issue which will be published, on a rolling basis, during the course of 2021.

As we go forward into the New Year and its challenges, may we all find strength and equanimity in the practices which we follow, including those that explore at the intersection of mindfulness and performance. May our theatrical and meditation lineages return us, again and again, to spacious and undaunted presence with what is. And may the work that we do be of benefit to all in these intense times.

"By first becoming present to your full self, you open the way for your presence to shine out and inspire your world" (Worley, 2018: 20).

## References

- Fabrice Midal (2012/2001) *Chögyam Trungpa: His Life and Vision*. Boston and London: Shambhala.
- Nicolás Núñez, Deborah Middleton, Franc Chamberlain (Eds) (2019) *Anthropocosmic Theatre: Theatre, Ritual Consciousness*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press.
- Lee Worley (2018) *Teaching Presence: Field Notes for Players*. Boulder: Naropa University

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