



ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

The Entity of the Body in the Theatre

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**Independent Project (Degree Project), 60 HEC, Master of Fine Arts in Contemporary
Performative Arts**

Spring Semester, 2020

Independent Project (Degree Project), 60 higher education credits

Master of Fine Arts in Contemporary Performative Arts

Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg

Spring Semester 2020

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Title: *The Entity of the Body in the Theatre*

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ABSTRACT

Key words: physical theatre, awareness, archetypes

The following thesis deals with the operation of “The Entity of the Body on the Stage.” By carefully examining a set of characters: The Actor, The Kidnapped, The Soldier and The Veiled Woman, that I have worked on/with during the past fifteen years as a director, choreographer and actor it became apparent that the focal point of research revolved around their bodies on the stage. By looking at each character in their own right I aim at elucidating their origin, not only in my theatrical endeavours, but also within a historical perspective relating to the notion of archetypes. In doing so it becomes clear that the bodies and their operation as entities in the theatre rely on the fundamental principle of being aware of being aware.

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1. Path Towards an Aware Body

During my practice as a director, choreographer and actor over the past fifteen years the operation of the body as an entity has been a driving force.¹ Throughout the pieces I have created the body has been a subject of taboo, religion, constraint and mystery. Coming from a speech oriented background I was confronted with controversy when staging silent bodies. What did they mean? What did they signify? The physical theatre tradition which was (and is) my field demanded a rigorous daily practice in order to enable the performers I worked with to attempt a unity between mind and body. An attempt at unity was necessary due to the fact that I experienced such separation in the mind-set of contemporary man, noticeable both in the theatre and in society at large. From the Enlightenment until today the Western society has firmly planted this idea that body and mind work on different levels.² In the performative act this becomes a hinder to the performer and director because it divides the person into sections which should be truly whole.

Throughout my studies the operation of *The Entity of the Body in the Theatre* acted as a guideline to clarify these terms in a practice-based research. Entity; *ens, esse* (Lat.) *ousia* (Gr.) the roots of entity speak of an *essential* being, whole upon which attributes/qualities can be superimposed. This is how I see the body in its purest form. In representations of characters/elements/abstractions on stage the body takes on several meanings. They could be social, cultural, religious and so on, these attributes build a frame of

¹ My theatrical journey began in the early 2000's in Baghdad, Iraq. After having emigrated to Sweden I founded the company Iraqi Bodies in 2009 (www.iraqibodies.com).

² Cf. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Michael Moriarty, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Especially the sixth meditation.

constraint around the body. Being as matter has been polluted with these attributes and the attributes begin to speak for the body instead of being itself. Because of this I approach the entity of the body from a philosophical viewpoint asking questions about being rather than using the terms in political terms which pushes the body back into the frame of attributes. These frames are most visible in categorization of theatre being for adults, children, disabled or ethnic minorities. All these categories are political, not philosophical because they deny the very fact that we all share a basis of being aware which runs as a current underneath physical dis/advantages, age, gender or race.

This current of being has two defined points; birth and death, both a mystery to our understanding. As a new-born child we have no knowledge of why we were born, suddenly we are here. Later in life we understand the mechanics of how life comes to be but we never fully understand or even remember how we came to be. Later in life the process of degeneration in the body tells us that we will not be here forever, a darkness awaits similar to the one we came from. Theatre as a reflection of life should therefore, from my perspective, stay tuned to this brief light that exists between the two dark spots of birth and death. This necessitates an inclusion of all categories of human life. Yet the mind set, the intellect, is so shaped by previous generations' and centuries' ideas that it becomes difficult to let go of judgments like good/bad, beautiful/ugly and elegant/vulgar. In theatre as a microcosm we have the possibility to re-shape those values, to try them out in different ways. All the different components in theatre; working with light/darkness, stage design, focus, composition, action and so on, help to "design" a world where mind/body is no longer separated but appears as the "whole aware performer" in total control of his entire being.

This theme has been running through my practice since I set out to make theatre. Sometimes I have gotten closer to my ideals, sometimes further away. Now is the time to reflect upon the practice I have led so far which includes methods from Stanislavski, Grotowski, Butoh, Mime, Dance-Theatre and circus. These different disciplines have, through time and daily practice, led me to work on several characters that has been recurrent throughout my pieces. Some characters have been in conjunction with other players, some have stood by themselves. To implement the question of the operation of the entity of the body in the theatre I have examined a set of four characters which I have previously performed but now re-visiting by further developing and discovering them. These characters include; *the kidnapped, the soldier, the veiled woman, and the actor*. Each of these characters are in one way or another scarred and exhibit a particular body language which functions as a text being read of the performers body. That text changes due to the work on transformation according to the needs of each character. Transformation in the sense of a rigorous process in which the operation of the entity of the body becomes apparent. This involves daily practice of various body, voice and breathing techniques through which the performers' body is then able to embody each character. Reaching the end of my "formal" studies I was able to create a piece of stage work that encompassed these four characters seen by the narrative of journeying through the brief light between birth and death. This accompanying text follows the structure of that performance and delves into each character that examines and furthers the absolute necessity for the actor to be aware of being aware.

In order to begin thinking of what an entity of the body in the theatre might entail I have to begin with examining what the body that inhabits the self might be. However, the question of the self, the "I", must first be given some consideration. In daily life the common

understanding of the self is that “I am”. That can be I am a man, I am a believer, I am a body, I am an actor, I am a director and so on. These questions lead me to question the nature of acting and whether or not “I” can actually “be” an actor—just as “I” believe that “I am Anmar” so does the relation between person and actor interact. What I have come to understand through more than fifteen years of theatrical research is that the actor is as illusory as the conception “I” have of “myself.” The notion of Anmar is founded on impressions that do not constitute the pure awareness of being. Take, as an example, sleeping—we say that “I slept well last night”—but how do we know that? We make an assumption that the waking “I” subsisted throughout a state that I actually cannot put into qualitative nor quantitative terms—I don’t know the quality of how my body was placed throughout the night nor do I know how many hours I might have slept. Yet I remain aware that I did indeed sleep based on the fact that when I wake in the morning I have an awareness of being aware—that my sleep was good, bad, long and so on. This awareness of being aware brings me back to the actor and the absolute necessity for the actor to be aware of his own awareness, sometimes called presence. I’ve found that the use of the term presence has sometimes not been the most efficient term to use because of its possible vague nature. To be aware of one’s awareness is more easily accessible because it heightens the levels of attention immediately. Once I am aware of being aware the “I” that I presumed was a man, actor, director, believer and so on. cannot be qualified as aspects of myself other than thoughts of myself. In the same way the hypothetical actor has to loose the thoughts of himself in order to become aware of being aware. Only then can the entity of the body in the theatre blossom into its full potential.

2. Daily Practice

I try breathing with a rhythm that is different from my daily breathing.

I try strange breathing as another creature.

Twist my mouth; change to another face.

Find body sounds that are different from my daily human voice.

When I have found them, they continue for a long time.

Enjoy the voice.

Finding another self, another creature.

There are so many hidden selves in the darkness of the body.

How many hidden selves can one meet?

Dance with them.

It is the present that travels in the whole self world.

These practices are important in the process of becoming a possessed body.

The awareness is not self-expression at all.

You do not dance by yourself; something else moves your body.

Another being who comes from an unknown dimension possesses your body and mind.

In Western movement practices, it is believed that you can possess your body and control it.

This is a misunderstanding about life and the body.

The awareness is not known about or understood, neither is the fact that life began four billion years ago.

Being aware that I am aware of my experiences I am not in control of anything. I am in the present and only the present matters to me. Normally, my daily ego believes that it is the owner and director of my body. When the body is moved by another power, the ego feels this as an intrusion.

When I try to clear out my body, I feel fear and resistance.

It is the edge between ego and an egoless state.

I taste the edge deeply.

I taste the reason why my ego feels fear and resistance.

I try to listen to what my life feels.

If I can catch the difference between ego and life, I notice that my ego doesn't like the feeling, but that my life enjoys being moved.

The mind, the body and the world are made out of consciousness but consciousness is not made out of them. It is made out of itself. Therefore, everything is made only out of consciousness (the mother of awareness).

In order to eliminate the daily life "I" rigorous practice is essential in order to quiet the current of thoughts and urges that permeate our existence. So far in my research the following bodily techniques support and nurture the blossoming of the flower that I seek to make possible. To develop them fully would require a whole book but I want to lay down the fundamental principles that are at work in them and as a result always present in the creation that performs itself on stage.

Noguchi Taiso

Michizo Noguchi (1914-1998) used to be a high school teacher, teaching gymnastics before the second World War. He was desperate in the ashes of defeat, devastated by the aftermath of the war, and nearly committed suicide... But, something happened to him. He discovered the fact that he had his own body with its own weight, a tangible reality, and he was somehow alive. He started exploring thoroughly his tangible body and how to move it, and created a new approach to the body called Noguchi taiso by discarding the idea of anatomical skeletal body. Noguchi taiso, meaning Noguchi's way of gymnastics or his physical exercises, became gradually known to people through his teaching at polytechnics and others in Tokyo. Especially young actors and dancers got interested in his ideas about the body and his unique physical exercises. In 1970s-1980s, young butoh dancers and students happened to learn Noguchi taiso and started using it for their butoh training. Sankaijuku, lead by Ushio Amagatsu, was one of them. Noguchi later worked for Tokyo Art University as a professor, and his approach became well known among drama directors and other related people who were keen about how to move or use the body effectively.³

The fundamental approach of Noguchi Taiso is that the body is a bag of water in which the bones are floating. It dissolves the anatomical structure that is prevalent in most physical exercises and gymnastics by discarding the idea that the bones "carry" the body. Seeing that the human body is made up of about 70% water the physical approach is that water is moving us—not the bones, muscles or tissues that support them.

³ Itto Morita, accessed 3 April, 2020, <http://www.ne.jp/asahi/butoh/itto/butoh-memorandums.htm>

An example of some of the exercises:

Shaking – 5-10 min

Shifting of weight – 5-10 min

Moving the pelvis, solar plexus and neck in the figure eight – 10-15 min

Letting the upper body fall in six directions (2x diagonally front, 2x diagonally back, 2x sideways) with weight shifts on alternating legs – 5-10 min

Undulation; pelvis, solar plexus neck – 5 min

“Letting fall” – 5-10 min

I define Noguchi Taiso as a creation of one's new self as nature within us. Noguchi Taiso draws from a natural force that exists in our body and that is expressed through and with the natural materials that our bodies are made of. Taiso = Gymnastics is a way of exploring HUMANITY. My whole being is laboratory (atelier), research material (canvas) and scholar (artist).⁴

Dance – Ballet/Modern/Jazz

Ballet [...] The principles of the form [are] : the turned-out shape of the legs, the five positions of the feet and arms, the elegance and upright posture. Key steps include the arabesque (where the dancer stands on one leg with the other extended straight behind them), jeté (a travelling jump) and the pirouette (a turn on one leg) [...] **Contemporary dance** is basically a catch-all term for the melange of modern and post-modern dance

⁴ “Body as Bones in a Leather Bag of Water: Exploring Noguchi Taiso”, accessed 3 April, 2020, <http://coreyhessbodytherapy.com/blog/tenthousandhorses/2019/6/8/body-as-bones-in-a-leather-bag-of-water-exploring-noguchi-taiso>

forms that developed during the 20th century as a reaction to the strict stylings of classical ballet. Out went the pointe shoes and tutus, the fairies and princesses, and in came a new world of endless possibility in movement.⁵

These techniques work on the rhythm and fluid movements of the body. The daily practice should consist of a mix between these including; *barre*, floorwork, choreographic phrases, jumps, *battements* and diagonals.

Butoh

Butoh originated in Japan with a performance called *Kinjiki* by Tatsumi Hijikata in 1959. It was originally named 'ankoku butoh' or 'dance of utter darkness', as Hijikata tried to distinguish his new dance. It was later shortened to Butoh and drew in the work of a number of other artists. Butoh was throwing off the constraints of Western dance and the rigidity of the highly codified Japanese traditions such as the ancient Noh drama and Nihon Buyo (Japanese classical dance). While butoh was born out of a rejection of western dance, there are pedagogical links between butoh's founders and German Expressionist dance. Hijikata also drew on the writings of Jean Genet and Antonin Artaud, among others. The contradictions within butoh are part of what make it fascinating.⁶

1. Slow down daily human active movement with using surface muscles. Open your hidden muscles and hidden joints to be moved by something including subtle signals from another invisible world.
2. Slow down active human eyes, and become rotten eyes. When you close daily physical eyes, you can open hidden eyes as third eye. *Eyes watch yourself from outside or from another dimension*

⁵ Lyndsey Winship, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.sadlerswells.com/dance-genres/ballet/>

⁶ Frances Barbe, "A Short Introduction to Butoh", accessed April 3, 2020, <https://www.sadlerswells.com/dance-genres/butoh/>

3. Slow down human talking, human voice and human words. Open your hidden skin and resonate with subtle vibrations from outside and behind world, like as whispers of dead.
 4. Slow down human habitual gross feeling and emotion. Listen in subtle change of your hidden fluid, and follow it.
 5. Slow down daily relationship and take off all human roles as gender, age, family, and society. Enter into strange relationship which you encounter unbelievable way of relationship.
 6. Slow down your ego and nationality. Both are the biggest barriers which disturb you from listening in real resonance between the world and self. Open subtle resonance between your life and all kinds of other dimensions including behind world, dead world, past world and so on.
 7. Slow down language thinking which is bound by dualistic judgment and hierarchy system. Just listen to the subtle qualia streaming in the darkness of body.
- Receive any kinds of subtle signal from your life as the most important awareness, even if the signals are extremely uncomfortable.
- Especially, face your edge. Important messages from life are always bitter.
- When you slow down all kinds of conditions as a human, you can become the weakened body and open full resonance ability as a life.

Yoga

In the yoga practices that I have explored, everything in nature is made up of five basic elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. Knowledge of the five elements allows the yogi to understand the laws of nature and to use yoga to attain greater health, power, knowledge,

wisdom and happiness.⁷ This arises out of deep intuition of how the universe operates.

Knowledge of the five elements is an essential pre-requisite for more advanced yoga practice because the elements form the world we live in and the structure of our body-mind. All yoga practices work on the five elements, whether we know it or not. Through consciously working with the elements, we learn how to attain and maintain health and also how to consciously enjoy a long and fulfilling life based on higher awareness.

Each element is responsible for different structures in the body. Earth forms solid structures, such as bones, flesh, skin, tissues, and hair. Water forms saliva, urine, semen, blood, and sweat. Fire forms hunger, thirst, and sleep. Air is responsible for all movement, including expansion, contraction, and suppression. Space forms physical attraction and repulsion, as well as fear. If any element is impure or out of balance with another, disease and suffering may occur. Yoga helps us purify these elements and restore balance and health, and to unfold the inner powers and abilities contained in each element.

The practice of yoga removes the blocks in the body so that you become available to all kinds of movement: lateral, diagonal and horizontal. Its purpose is not to stretch the body but to strengthen and enhance the perception of the body and breath. It also generates a force that emanates from the centre of the body which keeps it (the body) grounded. I found that Hatha Yoga is the most essential and by the daily practice of its asana's and pranayama's the body not only becomes supple but eradicates the mental garbage that accompanies the daily life "I".

⁷ The yoga practices that I have been exposed to the most during a sustained period of time (20 years) are Ashtanga and Hatha Yoga.

Acrobatics

The practice of basic acrobatics such as; headstand, handstand, shoulder stands, cart wheel and somersault not only enhances the body of the practitioners but also operate in partnering exercises with two or more people. In addition, acrobatics leads to the ability of mastering props such as juggling, unicycle, tightrope, aerial silks, trapeze and rola-bola which employ balance, strength, coordination and flexibility—all of which I employ on a daily basis

Pantomime

“Chaplin made me laugh and cry without saying a word. I had an instinct. I was touched by the soul of Chaplin — Mime is not an imitator but a creator.”

– Marcel Marceau

This stylized form of movement focusses on the isolation of all the body parts and works with holding tension in all the limbs in order to create suspension in the body. The mimetic aspect can be used both as an aesthetic and as a tool for theatrical staging. The aesthetic aspect includes the mimetic properties of recreating common gestures through poetic abstraction and sculptural images while as a tool it is essential for the body on the stage to be completely aware of every gesture and the appropriate tension of those very gestures.

3. The Actor

At the beginning of my theatre studies at the Fine Arts Institute our class was asked to take part in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" that was to be represented at the National Theatre in Baghdad. Ahead of the rehearsals I was confronted by an event of humanness that I later understood was brought about by the simple notion that the person I had encountered was as he was because he was an actor—a person taking notice of all the details that were lost on others around me. The humanness that I encountered proved to be the ability of recognizing the poetry in life, a vocation that haunts the actor wherever he goes. He was the lead—Hamlet—an exceptional human/actor. I was completely taken by his presence in equal measures on and off stage. At that moment I realized that acting goes beyond representation and flows into the inner life of the actor/human, proving that the stage extends beyond the theatre and that all daily encounters should be approached with an awareness of one's being as if always treading the planks of the stage, speaking with the words of our great playwrights simply because they said it better than most of us ever will—their words may be millennia's old but still ring true of the human condition.

Keys to approach the archetype of the Actor⁸

There has never been a moment in my life where I've actively considered the role of the actor. Perhaps in my infantile years during the first year of theatre studies—but not in any significant way, mostly as a joke. Throughout my theatre studies focus was exclusively placed on the ideal of the Thespian actor—I was completely fascinated and awestruck. After five years the focus on elocution, dramatic texts and stage settings seemed dull and repeating a formula that, although functioning, left me dry on the inside. This is not to say that Thespian actors in general exhibit this, but there is a tendency towards traditionalism that hasn't interested me since. Unfortunately, at that time, I didn't understand the great significance of elocution and rhetoric because no one mentioned the importance of breath rather than the words spoken.

When I speak about the actor today it all came from the first encounter I had with Antonin Artaud's texts, in particular *The Theatre and Its Double*.⁹ As is common knowledge Artaud never succeeded in implementing his theories on acting and theatre due to his enforced hospitalization. Theatre makers have struggled with this notion, from Peter Brook to Jerzy Grotowski, the latter devoting an entire chapter in his *Towards a Poor Theatre* on the impossibility of Artaud's suggested methods.¹⁰ What undeniably stuck with me, and has blossomed ever since, was the notion that the actor should not frame a dramatic text as a

⁸ In the following text archetype is referred to in its etymological sense as an original model: the literal translation from the Ancient Greek is *arkhē* [origin] *typos* [model]. From this reading archetypes are original models that we encounter on a daily basis in various forms such as, for example, *the actor*, *the soldier* or *the woman*. They especially proliferate in literature and theatre because of the essential knowledge and experience we all have of these models: a mother figure or a portrait of a soldier hanging on the living room wall and so on.

⁹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Victor Corti, (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2010).

¹⁰ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba, (Holstebro: Odin Teatrets Förlag, 1968).

set of signifiers that needs to be treated in a particular way in order to further the meaning of the text but that the actor should instead make equal use of his body and breath *as* the text. One example of this was to treat speech as you hear it in your dreams—noises, ambiances, meanings without corresponding signifiers.

I already mentioned Grotowski, and although Artaud is more prominent in my own research Grotowski nevertheless gives us the treatment of an archetypal actor—The Holy Actor. One could say a kind of high priest, or at least an archetype of noble heritage. The nobility of the actor must be present in his entire awareness of being—breath, speech and body in order to create bridges for the “infinite I” that encompasses all characters to take shape. This “I” is the ever-present awareness in which the personal, or separate self, “I” operates but with lack of awareness—that “I” remains imprisoned in identifications. The actor as an archetype in this sense—holy—permeates the vision and experience I have of the actor. He remains pure potentiality in order to actualize the myriad of roles, “I’s’”, that he will bring to life on stage, and in life too as the theatre and its mode outlives the spotlights in order to remain observant of the poetry of life.

Manifestation of the Actor in the work

While reading a book, or watching a movie one rarely, if ever, reflects on the fact that although the signs of letters and moving images is what engages our attention we are actually watching a blank page or a blank screen. The actor operates in the same way. He is there, ever-present but never admitting at being the actor. This notion of the actor laid the foundations of how I approached staging the archetype of the actor in the performance that offered glimpses of my research into the entity of the body on the stage.

The actor appears already in disguise—the mask. Throughout the appearance of the story that he recounts, or the memories he relives, or the future he predicts the actor remains in disguise as the various of archetypes of the soldier, the kidnapped and the veiled woman. All facets of the inexhaustible potentiality that the actor embodies by means of various distillments of forces that relate to dynamics and elemental forces already present in the lived body. Only at the end does the curtain-call announce that the actor must take his place, again in the *role* of the clown—but the actor was there all the time.

4. The Kidnapped

On a cold misty morning the kids were on their way to school. Before they got to the corner of the street they noticed something laying under the bushes. Their first interaction with a dead body—a young man, eyes blindfolded and tied hands. Bafflement, a wall of horror was erected at that moment that resists demolition. Who was he? Why was he there? I observed him for a bit, I was waiting for him to move or say something! I went away I kept thinking of him, he never left me since then.



Keys to approach the archetype of the Kidnapped

When meditating upon the archetype of the kidnapped I first encounter his physical existence. Someone has snatched him away from his safe environment. In English the word refers to a “kid” being “napped” but in Arabic the word used is *khatf* which can be used as being captivated by someone’s eyes or beauty. I could have called this archetype The Captivated but it doesn’t have the same ring and neither the same direct image we have when someone says *kidnap*. To be completely honest, The Kidnapped is not an archetype in the same way the Soldier or the Woman might be, but he is rather a specific kind under the head archetype The Victim. I nevertheless stick with calling him the kidnapped because it has closer affinities with my own experience. Coming back to his existence; the kidnapped is usually tied in some way—a blindfold, tied hands or feet. They signal the possibility of escape, a reality that is not impossible but highly improbable. So why tie him up? The only reason I can think of is the provocation of humiliation that engenders a sense of power in the perpetrator. The kidnapped, in his physical entity, not only loses his dignity in that he has been stolen away, he is humiliated by the fact that although he cannot escape he is still kept like an animal.

Going deeper into my meditation I find that beyond the physical appearance of the kidnapped lies a more profound provocation. The sense of being “stolen away” from oneself, unable to see where to turn next, of blindfolding oneself without being aware of the cause of that blindfolding. This relates back to the “head” archetype of the kidnapped, The Victim, in that once the victim admits that he is a victim he cannot get out of that identification. Likewise, the kidnapped, once he views himself as kidnapped, cannot but

succumb to the reality that this will be the constituting factor of his self. In the physical sense there is always a relation between the perpetrator and the kidnapped, even an intimate relation. In the spiritual sense the perpetrator and the kidnapped live in one body. Here it is not his eyes that are blindfolded but his vision, not his hands that are tied but his memories, not his feet that are tied but his sense of meaning. He is immobilized by his self-arrestment.

Manifestation of the Kidnapped in the work

This character takes on the outward shape of what we would normally call a kidnapped person. He is dressed in the traditional *dishdasha* but stripped of any other essential attributes except his blindfold.¹¹ He is a figment of my imagination. A crossbreed between an ordinary looking man and the burning corpses that fill the streets at times of war. At one moment there, at the other still there but transformed into ashes. The physical work that began the making of this character was the simple notion of earth. A lump of earth that desperately tries to ascend to the sky above—much like our lumps of flesh strive towards better things. Only this lump of earth has been toasted and is still exhaling smoke from the impact. His outer appearance has not changed but his behavior and physical gestures have. He has lost his speed and dexterity and is forced into moving with an extreme exactitude that requires profound silence of movement—slowing down.

¹¹ The *dishdasha* is a traditional garment used by men across the Middle East and North Africa. It is a long tunic—various lengths are available ranging down to the knees to the ankles.

His vision, memories and meaning have been stolen from him. But he is still alive, making himself present by still being a body, not only ashes. This is the first movement towards escaping his sense of self-arrest. The twitching of his wrist, the elongated silhouette all strive towards reclaiming his vision and shedding his costume. The actor who transforms into the kidnapped is at the same moment he is transformed weighed down by the invisible perpetrator and knows exactly how to play his part. He begins the path of an intimate relation between himself as kidnapped and kidnapper. In the end it is only the naked flesh of his body that can manifest him as still human and so he overcomes the lump of earth he will sooner or later return to.

5. The Soldier

He is missing! That's what they reported to his family. His face etched on the wall, he looked present as if he was there among us even though he actually was miles away on the front line. I was eagerly awaiting the cartoons starting at six o'clock every evening—tonight they are showing Nils Holgersson. Last weeks episode the fox was chasing Morten and Nils; I wonder what will happen tonight. The TV is turned on, quarter to six, news from the frontlines. I hear them crying, that's where he is they say. I want Nils to come on, not the report from the front line. Finally, the cartoon starts but he never came back home, lost in a landscape just before six o'clock every evening... A long time after there was a knock on the door—Nils was on repeat—nobody except a coffin covered with the flag at the front door. Crying again. The body turned into a dynamite of wood that ignites everyone and everything around it. His last firing shot.



Keys to approach the archetype of the Soldier

The last firing shot of the soldier not only echoes in my ears but has been a continuous echo throughout history and thus operates as an archetype not only in the cognitive make-up of humanity but also part and parcel of our shared *mythos*. Mythology, the stories that emerge from it and how those stories have informed our preconception of the world nevertheless began as a *report* (the literal translation of *mythos*) that took place within a discourse of words, speech or more commonly reason—*logos*—from the Greek *iégō* “*I say*”. Already we see that there is a tension between telling a story and creating a logic/reason around that story, specifically a tension between an imagined account and the various meanings that account might account for. Regardless of personal experience of war, soldiers and military reports. we are a species that are closely tied with the idea of war and the dispensable bodies that make up a defeat or victory—the soldier. So, within what parameters does the soldier operate? There are several; power, dominance, war-machine, sacrifice and others. Two parameters that interests me more than the others are those of *freedom* and *innocence* that seem to figure in the background as fundamental ideas that the soldier must embody.

Freedom, in the soldier, is often a freedom to take rather than to give. It is an authoritarian freedom that negates the subjects’ rights to a supposed free will in place of acting as a human shield from whichever threat is posed from the outside. The authoritarian utopia is, as we know, a founding idea of Western Philosophy put down in Plato’s *Republic* where allotments according to skill and predisposition were placed on the soldier cast—just

below the Philosopher-Kings.¹² Yet the underlying movement in having the freedom to take is the ability to secure a “safe place” for others to live. This leads me to the loss of innocence that is fundamental to the soldier. An innocence he has to give up in order to “become a man” and act as custodian of the imagined peoples’ “safe place”. The loss of innocence is also a ritualized behavior that relates to the role of protecting the family—still today rites are undergone by young boys who have to pass through a series of “tests” in order to prove their masculinity. Some of those rites are undertaken by national military ministries, others in the bushes of sand strewn expanses and dense jungles. However different they might seem they perpetuate the age old archetype of the soldier. Today, ironically, we maintain symbols of war in otherwise secularized and predominantly peaceful countries by bulking up at the gym, wearing camouflage parkas and playing war videogames without the threat of returning in a wooden box. It seems that although there are less and less cause for bloodshed there remains a primordial urge for the freedom to take rather than to give and that the loss of innocence is still practiced outside the front line. This primordial urge is something that is present in my work and that has informed my work through the many plays and theatrical staging’s that heralds the soldier reaching for a higher self (which is here meant as an archetype). The examples are numerous; Oedipus Rex, Caligula, Othello, Coriolanus and so many others.

¹² Plato, *The Republic*, trans. R.E. Allen, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Manifestation of the Soldier in the work

No matter how many ideas, concepts or even experiences I might have of the soldier they amount to nothing as soon as the process of transformation begins on the stage. All I have is the primordial urge of the fire that burns in the soldier. In that moment the limited “I” that I identify with in daily life has to be obliterated leaving me with the profound sense of being the soldier. He is not an invention, a cluster of historical and philosophical ideas nor a “character” in the sense of representation. All the soldiers are me, and I am all the soldiers. This is not a process that comes about magically but requires focused practice in order to eliminate the daily “I” that wants to be seen.

The soldier has fed and nurtured on the daily practice of a research into the element of fire. Fire comes in many forms; licking flames, burning embers, flickers and the heat of dying ash. The soldier must live all these forms. In the performance he is introduced at the moment he gets dressed in the soldier uniform. From the actor who is disappointed but reawakened by the smoke of the kidnapped the rigidity of the soldier takes shape. Once in his own environment the unstoppable shaking of his tense limbs both predict and execute the inner turmoil of the soldiers’ mission—he is literally boiling; from rage, from despair, from the notion that everything will end. Only at the end, when he has reached the end can the transformation yet again change shape into a *play* on the archetype of the soldier. An archetype that keeps on shooting but only ends up targeting himself.

6. The Veiled Woman

A taxi passed as she appeared, for a couple of minutes she stood still, looked like time and space didn't exist until she emerged slowly towards us as if her legs couldn't get her anywhere and stood still for seconds of silence. The most extravagant dance I have ever seen, her voice and her movement were purifying pain and beauty as she ripped her black Abaya, underneath her turquoise dress that she continued to tear through, revealing the skin, as if never before having been exposed to the daily environment of violence and despair. Out of the house the others run to cover her body and carry her inside. An abrupt end.



Keys to approach the archetype of the Veiled Woman

The mourning rites of women is not something I've only read about—I've experienced them first-hand. These rites are not to be taken lightly, they are violently ferocious and to a young child stuff of nightmares. In a sense the Veiled Woman, clad in black, is at the opposite spectrum of the Soldier but they remain inextricably linked by an umbilical cord that never gets cut. Her suffering is a direct result of his defeat just as his losing battle is only made possible through her intervention of birth. She remains a victim of masculinity. From the moment of birth she is guarded by her father and brothers only to be handled over to her husband and then again dominated by her own sons. Yet amidst this circular motion of abuse she remains standing the longest by outliving all of them—she becomes able to predict the future by virtue of her experience, not so much by divine intervention.

The predicament of the Woman in theatre can be traced to Euripides' plays where wilful and desperate measures sees the protagonists of Antigone, Medea and Helen overcome their imprisonment by fierce actions of defiance. They murder, they love and they bury the ones that they lost all the while condemned not only by their family heads but by the entire society. The predicament of these characters left me moved and I had a direct knowledge not only of their actions but also their motivations for behaving in an extreme manner. The dramatic texts that carved out an archetype of the Veiled Woman put into context the reality that I was living. Bizarrely the inventions of dramatists 2500 years before my time described and made an irrational logic, but nevertheless a logic, available to read the behavior of all those women in black moving like birds throughout the market. I heard stories

of black figures setting fire to themselves, drowning themselves or simply deciding to never speak again. Mothers became grandmothers, great-grandmothers, great-great-grandmothers all the while caring for their extended family as if they were their first-born. Where does this resilience come from?

While the first association usually comes to mind, in Western contexts, of the veiled woman as an agent-less person, or a person shackled by a patriarchal society, there is so much more at stake. While the above is true my experiences have led me to the thought that the veil, the black cover, is like the uniform of the soldier. Besides being an essential piece of clothing in extreme heat where its cool fabric relieves skin from the sweltering sun it is also marked by an appreciation for vulnerability. It is an enclosure that can conceal the sudden outburst of passion and anger. The wearer is also someone who is feared and is not to be messed with because of the superstitious beliefs that certain women casts curses. This leads me to the notion of the veiled woman as a soothsayer but also an oracle and because of this should not show her face because of the supposed damage it might inflict upon the observer. In this there is a potent symbolism present in the value of one's face and the importance of only showing one's face for a true encounter to take place.

Manifestation of the Veiled Woman in the work

Throughout my work the veiled woman has cropped up in various settings and forms. While working on the performance it was important for me to distil the most important aspect of her reincarnations on stage I had done so far. Those aspects were resilience and the importance of the true encounter between her face and the observers. She is the last character that appears in a space other than that of the actor and brings to the stage a sense of calm but also resigned anger. She is the undercurrent of the waves that bring about the storm. In terms of physical practices, the element of water was the main guide for movement research. A water that gently flows to and fro with the anticipation of a greater tidal wave. Her body is one black mass that has the possibility of transforming to various creatures—yet in that possibility she chooses to show her face and in so doing knowingly puts the observers at risk. They might not be in a position to reciprocate a true meeting and thereby fall under her spell. That spell could be prejudice, fright, pity or simply an overwhelming sense of denial. Because nothing of her body is shown the face that emerges poses the possibility of her either not having a body or having a body that is not humanlike—she could be a hydra.

The importance of her turning away from the observers marks the unending path she remains on, walking into an infinity of unknown disasters but also the love she shares for our human race by continuing to rear children well beyond her age—children that will continue to destroy the world she nevertheless immensely cares for.

7. Descriptive Impossibilities

The above characters, as I mentioned, have been with me for a very long time. By exposing the operation that they carry and nurture by and through their entities of their bodies—a resonance was required through being aware of my own being aware. This, however, is beyond rehearsing in either words or actions. The daily practice that I referred to earlier are indispensable for this resonance to take place. In this I confront a linguistic problem—the division of mind and body. The daily practice attunes my being which opposes the distinction between mind and body—the two are the same: transient. I want to try to touch upon the heart of the matter which is our awareness. This is not a transient aspect, awareness doesn't care if the actor is involved, detached, internalized, externalized or any other qualifier that one might think of. Awareness remains. It is therefore not a question of “getting into character” in any psychological sense—my body already is the various characters that can find their outlet in a gesture, a mask (face), posture, gait and so on. I return to the characters that I have explored. If I could I would try to describe the work that goes on in resonating with them.

Unfortunately, this is a movement that goes beyond the limitations of description and that is why it only exists in the lived moment on stage. What I can do is to give hints as to what various tendencies that have, and continue, to guide me.

8. Searching

I have tried to put into “words” only a fraction of the immense experience that has not only been felt during my studies but throughout my whole life. There are many examples and sources of inspiration that I have not been able to mention, not because of restraint but because they cannot be contained in words. Nothing I have said above makes any sense, it does not have to, all I can bear witness to is that sense is not helpful in the search for an entity of the body at stage. We construct sense in our separate self, we might be aware of sense but it does not matter when blossoming into the awareness of being aware where sense becomes senselessness.

I am leaving the impressions that the text so far has suggested open. Instead of an end I suggest a continued search and propose the last words to be written on the following pages as an echo of not only myself but humanity and the response we can make by being aware of being aware and so claim the entity of the body in theatre as constantly transforming.

Echo

“I” am an Arab, a Muslim, and “I” lived under Saddam. Those are reasons enough to put a wall around your thoughts, as in a prison. It is as if “I” had been imprisoned for over thirty years. I’m still blinking incredulously at the sun. Migration was not the only unpleasant experience I went through. I was born and lived in a country ruled by a brutal dictator whose wars never ended, and from an early age I was passionate about understanding the world through knowledge and art. I grew up during the years of economic sanctions. Life was

almost dead because the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the civilized world were so strict! I remember in art classes at school I learned how to draw tanks and soldiers opening fire. They didn't teach me the names of the flowers that grew around us in the city, wild flowers of all kinds and all colors. Our teachers used to whip the kids with their belts. My father was constantly violent toward my mother for the most trivial reasons. I didn't think about fear much at the time. I felt angry about everything that was happening around me, the violence of society and the force of surviving... Going through it and many heavier life experiences there, one thing that was always there was the sensation that I was always present regardless of the good or bad, regardless where or when it was. I was always present, the present was the *I* that witnessed all my experiences, beyond body and identity! Coming to know this was a big discovery, being able to be in touch with my self from the perspective that I'm my consciousness which operate beyond my body/mind will, therefore everything is made only out of consciousness. From this consciousness awareness constantly seeps.

*How can I talk in a classical language about a child who's been torn apart in an explosion in
the market near his school?*

Nothing in theater has any meaning before or after. Meaning is now.

Even my own arms, deep inside my body feel foreign to me, feel like they do not belong to me.

There lies an important secret.

If awareness is/has/been neglected the educational system bears a heavy weight for letting that happen. No space is given to the important secret of the unknown but deeply felt.

No school in the world teaches the possibility of a new fluid intelligence and the art of a creative life, which are the most important findings in the past fifty years.

The reason is that there is a dangerous possibility that these new findings might change the framework of modern society. The classical framework of intelligence, taught in one's education and training, supports the social system of modern capitalism. Schools, hospitals, factories, offices, prisons, and other forms of mass communication are the plants for producing spontaneous supporters. This is why we are never taught the possibilities of new ways of thinking and living.

The School is the printing factory for printing the old way of thinking into people's minds.

Get out of school.

Throw off the old style intelligence.

Throw out the state.

Clear out your body.

If I persevere on this path I hope to remain aware of being aware.

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