



***Adapting the Dharma:
Buddhism and Contemporary Theatre Training***

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Abstract: In this paper, we explore two examples of Western theatre practice which draw directly on Buddhist monastic dance. Examining Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's Mudra Space Awareness alongside Mexican theatre director Nicolás Núñez's Citlalmina allows us to consider the ways in which aspects of Buddhism might be conveyed within performative form, and to consider these practices as *translations* from Vajrayana Buddhism. This discussion opens into a consideration of the ways in which Buddhism and theatre might be seen to be mutually enriching, and to share certain common potentials as vehicles for cultivation.

Keywords: Vajrayana; meditation-in-movement; cultivation; theatre

MUDRA SPACE AWARENESS

Introduction

In the 1970s, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche developed a form of practice that was intended specifically for theatre artists. In 1968, whilst still at Samye Ling in Scotland, Trungpa met the playwright, Jean-Claude van Itallie, whose memoir records that Trungpa asked him questions about the theatre (Gimian, 2004: liii). According to Carolyn Rose Gimian, Trungpa developed an 'intense interest in theater' (Gimian, 2004: liii), and by 1973, a small Buddhist theatre group had formed around him, and he was at the centre of a controversial theatre conference attended by several key avant garde theatre practitioners, including Jean-Claude van Itallie and Lee Worley (both then associated with the Open Theater), as well as Robert Wilson and others (Gimian, 2004: lv). On the day after the conference, Gimian records that, 'Rinpoche introduced the first series of Mudra Space Awareness exercises, which became the foundation for the theater work done by his students for many years' (Gimian, 2004: lxii).

In 1975, Lee Worley was invited by Trungpa to develop a theatre programme for what would eventually become Naropa University. Worley has taught the Mudra Space Awareness exercises (MSA) extensively to actors and others, at Naropa and in workshops

in the USA and Europe. Drawing on our experiences of Worley's teaching¹, we look, here, at Mudra Space Awareness as an example of Buddhist practice being transmitted from a Vajrayana context (Gimian, 2004: lxiv; Worley, 2016: 107) into the realm of contemporary Western actor training.

Background

As a young Lama, Trungpa had learned and then taught the *Chakrasamvara* dance of the Surmang monastery in Tibet (Trungpa, 2003: 89–90). The exercises that formed the basis of MSA seem either to have been derived from the dance itself, or, as Worley reports, to have been preparatory exercises used by the monks in training for the dance (Worley, 2016: 107).

The *Chakrasamvara* dance describes a mandala, and entails the performers dressing as deities (Comstock, 2012: no page; Trungpa in Worley, 2010: 95–97); in twos, they represent the male-female pairing of Chakrasamvara and Vajrayogini (Trungpa in Worley, 2010: 95). Sixty-four dancers, holding large drums and bells, perform 'an extremely slow-moving twenty-four-hour nonstop dance' (Worley, 2016: 107) in the context of a larger 'sadhana' involving music and the chanting of texts (Worley, 2018).

The choreography is described by Trungpa as replete with symbolism. He makes reference to mudras, and tells us that 'each step and each movement of the hands, arms, and head has its own symbolic meaning' and that the dance 'expresses the ascent from the level of a beginner to final realization' (Trungpa, 2003: 92).

Beyond the symbolic and communicative aspects of the dance, however, we find other functions. Lyndon Comstock identifies it as a 'meditational dance', and as an example of a Vajrayana practice for 'helping the practitioner clarify their mind and be present with things as they are' (Comstock, 2012: no page).

Trungpa notes that the dance is 'part of *hatha yoga* practice, supposedly' (Worley, 2010: 96) and describes it, in contrast to traditional Tibetan dance, as 'more connected with Tai Chi or something like that' (Worley, 2010: 96). This suggests that in addition to the dance's symbolism, it also functions as a vehicle for psychophysical cultivation—that is, as a reconditioning of mind and body—in the context of a spiritual path.

Synchronizing Mind and Body

With regard to psychophysical reconditioning, Trungpa refers, in his writings, to a fundamental need for synchronization. For example,

Synchronizing mind and body ... is a basic principle of how to be a human being and how to use your sense perceptions, your mind, and your body together. The body can be likened to a camera, and the mind to the film inside the camera. The question is how you can use them together. (Trungpa, 1984: 39)

Mudra Space Awareness represents a vehicle for directly synchronizing mind and body. As a training for the theatre, it operates at what Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese call a

¹ Both authors have practised Mudra Space Awareness with Lee Worley; Middleton during a four-month sabbatical spent as a Visiting Scholar at Naropa University in 2010; Plá at a workshop in Dechen Chöling in 2016.

‘pre-expressive’ level of practice (Barba and Savarese, 1991:186–204). The pre-expressive refers to the level of psychophysical ‘organisation’—or integration—‘which deals with how to render the actor’s energy scenically alive, that is, with how the actor can become a presence which immediately attracts the spectator’s attention’ (Barba and Savarese, 1991:188).

It has long been recognised that theatre performance requires training in the fundamentals of basic presence. In one of his seminal books on actor-training, Stanislavski wrote (in the voice of his alter ego, Tortsov), that the trainee actors’ first two years of work had brought them to ‘nothing more than the simplest, most normal human condition’ (Ruffini, 1991:150). Franco Ruffini calls that condition ‘organic body-mind’—the construction of which takes place at the pre-expressive level (Ruffini, 1991:152).

Trungpa’s offer to actors—Mudra Space Awareness—addresses precisely this level of practice. It is not a training in acting technique, but rather a reconditioning of the psychophysical foundation—what Ruffini calls the ‘first condition’—upon which acting processes can be built (Ruffini, 1991:152). In fact, for Trungpa, it is not only actors who need to pay attention to the synchronizing of mind and body, and not merely acting that is enhanced through the Mudra Space Awareness training. In 1973, discussing one of the MSA exercises, he said,

The whole thing about this particular training is not so much to learn how to act, but learn how to redo our existence in order to learn to exist. (Worley, 2010: 5).

The MSA approach to this most fundamental of questions—how to exist—is decidedly through the body. Trungpa’s address to the actors continued, ‘That we do exist, that we have to start with the backbone, the spinal cord...’ (Worley, 2010: 5); and Worley reports that Trungpa suggested that the actors needed to ‘re-member’ themselves—that is, to cultivate a deeper state of embodiment (Worley, 2016: 107).

Mudra Space Awareness takes the form of a series of embodied visualisations which engage the practitioner in processes of muscular intensification and release². As Gimian describes it, ‘The exercises involve assuming various postures and then intensifying the space around oneself. Very slow, deliberate movements and intensified breathing may also be part of an exercise’ (Gimian, 2004: lxiii).

Initially, the practice—which is organised into two stages—focuses on intensification, but later this becomes the precondition for a degree of relaxation and release that may not otherwise be attainable. It is usual for the practitioner to experience difficulty in both stages—disconnected areas of the body are discovered, where intensification is difficult to bring about; at the same time, we realize the extent to which we are habitually ‘intensified’ against the experience of our own lives.

Working at the level of fundamental activities such as breathing, moving, engaging and releasing muscular activity, and sustaining awareness of the spaces around and within the body, the practitioner develops a detailed familiarity with the foundations of their mental and physical experience. The extent of one’s disembodiment, lack of

² A description of some aspects of MSA can be found in Worley (2016). A first-person account can be found in Worley (2012) ‘Mudra Space Awareness’ in *Performance and Spirituality*. Vol. 3, No. 1.

coordination, and inability to relax becomes evident. Over time, the practice brings about a greater degree of psychophysical integration, and facilitates a shift in the practitioner's relationship with their own bodymind.

Trungpa has suggested that 'when mind and body are properly synchronized, then you have clear perception and you have a sense of being without doubt...' (1984: 39). Clear perception relates to the way in which we interact with sensory input; rather than overloading the direct sensory experience with mental projections, or defending oneself against it, the psychophysically synchronized practitioner is able to perceive in a more spontaneous, full, and direct manner.

Lee Worley has noted that the exercises of MSA are 'mentally and physically rigorous in undermining discursiveness of mind and body' (Worley, 2016: 107). Just as, in sitting meditation, the practitioner comes to observe, detach from, and decrease mental agitation, so too in Mudra Space Awareness, habitual activations of mind and body are gradually transformed. Both mind and body become 'quieter'—less restless, less compulsive—allowing deeper levels of sustained somatic awareness to develop.

Trungpa likened the first set of MSA exercises to *shamatha* meditation—'peaceful abiding'—and the second set to *vipashyana*—'clear seeing' (Worley 2010, 58). A disciplined psychophysical focus opens the way to a less mediated and hence more vivid experience of the world; so much so that Trungpa writes, 'Synchronizing mind and body is looking and seeing beyond language' (1984: 41).

Reginald Ray, who was also a student of Trungpa (in fact, a lineage holder), teaches a number of comparable body-based practices (see Ray, 2014), which are also informed by his study of Western somatic traditions³. Ray notes that it is usual for a person's sense of their bodily experience to be dominated by their conceptual thinking. Somatic awareness is atrophied and must be reconditioned through body-based practice that facilitates 'bypassing the mental map and beginning to tune in directly to what's actually going on in the body' (Ray, 2016b: 219). This is the sense in which the actor can 're-member' the body.

For Worley, to re-member is 'to become authentic, integrated human beings' (Worley, 2016: 107). At the time of Trungpa's development of MSA, this notion of the actor's authenticity was being explored in seminal ways by theatre practitioners of whom we know Trungpa was aware. Van Itallie, for example, recalls telling Trungpa about the work of Jerzy Grotowski, who had developed in the 1960s a highly influential form of psychophysical training in his Polish Theatre Laboratory. His 'holy' actors underwent a 'via negativa' process; not accruing theatrical stage skills, but rather divesting themselves of all that stood in the way of their naked and authentic human presence (Grotowski, 1968).

One way in which we can understand how an actor reveals an underlying authenticity, through working with the body, is suggested by Ray,

³ Ray is a recognised Vajrayana teacher, and Buddhist scholar. He holds a doctorate in the History of Religions. In *Touching Enlightenment: Finding Realization in the Body*, Ray acknowledges that the largely Tibetan Yoga-based approach to meditation described in the book has also been informed by his study of Western somatic practices (including training with Gerda Alexander), indigenous "earth-based spiritualities," and various Buddhist traditions (2008/2014: xvi–xvii).

One of the purposes of somatic meditation is to enable us to examine what we could call the ego body—that is, the body as it's viewed by our ego, through the filter of our concepts, as a static entity (Ray, 2016b: 219).

Through the deepened somatic experience of Mudra Space Awareness, the practitioner can become aware of the body's presence, beyond, and quite different from, the ego's fixed and fictional image of it. For actors, this process might offer the possibility to divest themselves of neurotic tensions and egoic obstacles to full presence. Over time, the practitioner may discover simpler and calmer qualities of being, through a willingness to be present in a way that is less defended, and less mediated by ego.

When viewed and experienced in this way, free from habitual 'discursiveness of mind and body', the perceived reality of the body can profoundly change. As Ray writes, of his own Buddhist bodywork, 'We might find that, rather than being solid, our body seems filled with space' (Ray, 2014: 207).

Space Awareness

The opening exercise in the MSA 'First Set' is called 'Intensification of Space'. Starting from the sense of one's body, lying in position on the floor, awareness is expanded towards and then through and beyond the other people in the room, the walls, floor and ceiling, and out into the expanses of earth, sky, and cosmos. The 'space' of MSA is all-pervasive; as intimate as the space between one's arm and the side of one's body; as extensive as outer space. 'Awareness' of space is both the act of tuning into the proprioceptive information available to the psychophysical system, and the act of imagining beyond the reach of the immediate sensory environment.

As a mental training, Worley tells us that, 'The practice rekindles the mind's natural flexibility by not allowing it to fixate, narrow, or become biased...' (Worley, 2016: 109). One cannot both hold a sense of inner and outer space and at the same time retract into a narrow ego-consciousness. Thus, the sense of a separate 'I' is difficult to sustain through the experiences of intensified and relaxed relating to space. Worley notes that when muscular intensification is released into deep relaxation, 'habitual clutching at "me" and "my body" dissolves' and 'an empty but bright spaciousness appears' (Worley, 2016: 110).

In MSA, then, as in other Buddhist body-based meditation practices, ego reification and identification start to dissolve, and the patterns of ego-based mentation that support the habitual sense of a solid and continuous self are disrupted, leading into an awareness of the emptiness of self. Worley writes that a crucial aspect of MSA is the use of 'mental and physical effort to examine the origin of ego's development out of the nonduality of *shunyata* or emptiness' (Worley, 2016: 109). Thus, the embodied form of MSA may serve as a vehicle for realizations regarding the fundamental nature of reality.

Indeed, according to Ray, in Tibetan Yoga (by which he refers to 'advanced, esoteric, somatic Vajrayana practices'), the view is held that 'realization is the result of greater and greater embodiment' (Ray, 2008: 50–51).

Before we go further with our discussion of the ways in which meditation-in-movement practices can function as Buddhist teaching vehicles, let us turn to our second example of a theatre training which incorporates a Buddhist monastic dance.

CITLALMINA

Introduction

Nicolás Núñez is a Mexican theatre practitioner who has been directing the *Taller de Investigación Teatral* under the auspices of UNAM in Mexico City since 1975. Living in the culturally and spiritually syncretic context of contemporary Mexico, where living indigenous traditions and six centuries of European influence intermingle, Núñez set out to create a *mestizo* theatre that balances indigenous performance forms with the imported European theatre. To this end, he has carried out extensive research in Mexico, and with leading teachers of theatre in Europe and the United States. Most significantly, between 1978 and 1985, he worked closely with Grotowski, the Polish director about whose work van Itallie had talked to Trungpa in Scotland in 1968. By the time of Núñez's engagement with him, Grotowski had left behind his work on theatre productions, and turned to the creation of intensive participatory modes of 'art as vehicle' (Kolankiewicz, 1979) that would open to all participants the experiences he had explored with his actors. With Grotowski, Núñez and his creative collaborator, Helena Guardia, participated in Theatre of Sources; a painstaking embodied research into performative source traditions from many different cultures (Schechner & Wolford, 1997).

In the context of this background, and inspired by the notion that there are similarities between Mexican Náhuatl and Tibetan Buddhist philosophies and traditions (Núñez, 1996: 12–16), Núñez spent a year in Dharamsala at the Tibetan Institute for Performing Arts in 1986. There, he and two members of his company, Guardia and Ana Luisa Solis Gil, were hosted by the Tibetan Buddhist community in exile.

Prior to the visit to India, Núñez and Guardia were already conversant with Buddhist philosophy and practice, amongst other contemplative traditions. Since 1975, they had also practised meditation within the Sufi tradition and had extensive experience of meditation-in-movement (through Sufism, Gurdjieff techniques, and the work with Grotowski). They write that the experience in India deepened their understanding of Dharma, and that Buddhism provided a terminology well attuned to the mental training that they were already developing in their work with actors (Núñez, 2018)⁴. Additionally, the theatre practitioners were able to attend ritual festivities, and to learn a meditation-in-movement form that would come to be a cornerstone of their theatre practice: the Black Hat dance, *Lha-lhung Pay-dor* from the Tashi Lhumpo monastery.

Like Trungpa's *Chakrasamvara* dance, *Lha-lhung Pay-dor* is performed in a circle and involves symbolic communication; it depicts an allegory in which a warrior frees

⁴ Key Buddhist-related terms used by Núñez in his teaching include: mindfulness, awareness, full attention, here and now, wakefulness; key metaphors include the Windhorse, and Manjushri's sword; 'attention is the sword that tears the veil of ignorance and illusion' (Núñez, 2018).

a village from tyranny by killing ‘the bad king or the ego’ (Núñez, 1996: 11). Whilst Trungpa’s dance form was extremely slow-moving, *Lha-lhung Pay-dor* is a fast-moving form, incorporating highly dynamic sequences.

Background

Like the *Chakrasamvara* dance practised by Trungpa, this is also a meditation in motion, which creates what Núñez calls ‘a type of mandala in motion which charges the performer with energy’ (Núñez, 1996: 102). For Núñez, the dance bore certain similarities to the traditional Náhuatl conchero dances of Mexico, in that both can be seen as ‘warrior dances’. For Núñez, these are practices in which the performer ‘allegorically, is a warrior fighting his battle ... striving to maintain the level of attention in the ‘here and now’” (Núñez 1996: 12). On the basis of this perceived similarity, Núñez created a syncretic choreography which combined the Black Hat dance alongside a sequence of conchero steps from the Mexican tradition (see Middleton 2001: pp. 54–56). In keeping with the symbolic aspects of the source dances, he gave the form an allegorical Nahuatl name: *Citlalmina*—the archeress who shoots arrows at the stars. Permission to work with the source traditions in this way as a ‘tool for mental training’ was granted by HH the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in 1982 (and by the foremost of the Mexican conchero authorities); Núñez received the Dalai Lama’s ‘blessing’ on the practice during a visit by His Holiness to Mexico in 1989 (Núñez, 1996: 102). I [Middleton] have been authorised to practise and teach *Citlalmina* since 2000⁵.

Whereas Trungpa appears to have focused either on the preliminary exercises or on principles from the *Chakrasamvara* dance, but did not include the dance itself in his development of MSA, Núñez retained the choreography of the Black Hat dance exactly. His interest was in revealing the core psychophysical structure by discarding the peripheral ornamentations of costume and bone trumpets. *Citlalmina* consists of repetitions of the Tibetan choreography interspersed with repetitions of the Náhuatl conchero dance; the form takes about one hour to complete. Importantly, the integrity of each dance is maintained; they do not interfere with one another but are performed in a sequence of Mexican-Tibetan-Mexican, repeated three times. The form begins with the blowing of conches (sacred in both traditions), and with a series of conchero steps which carry the intention of asking permission from the energies to perform the dance.

Citlalmina has now been a central part of the TRW’s repertoire of psychophysical training dynamics for thirty years. It is strictly viewed as a training form rather than a performance piece; the dance is designed for participation, not viewing. Although fundamentally intended as a vehicle for actor-training, many non-actors have joined the weekly *Citlalmina* sessions, seeing the form as a vehicle for personal development and as a way to engage with pre-Hispanic Mexican culture, albeit in this perhaps surprising marriage with a Tibetan Buddhist monastic dance.

⁵ Middleton has trained extensively with Núñez on fieldtrips to Mexico and in Núñez’s visits to Europe since meeting him in 1993.

Meditation-in-Movement

Whilst the body alphabet derived from the Mexican tradition is earthy, grounding, and based in stepping and stamping movements, the Tibetan dance emphasises upper-body fluidity, with raised and sweeping arm movements, and pauses in which one comes to a standstill, balanced on one leg.

Núñez's instruction to participants contains two key principles:

Keep our internal attention alive, tuning it to our breathing, without allowing the mind to wander; Flow with the mandalic design which completes the dance at an organic rhythm, which helps us to keep our attention on the here and now.
(1996:102)

At its most basic level, participation in the form requires a high degree of focused attention and spatial awareness – hence the description of it as a tool for *mental* training. If concentration is lost, it is extremely difficult to remember where one is in the repetitions and cycles of movement. Counter-intuitive turns can cause a participant with a wandering mind suddenly to find themselves facing the wrong direction, colliding with the person next to them, or otherwise missing a crucial change in the choreography. Embedded in the form we find repetitive and changing rhythms, complex movement protocols, pauses sustained as precarious balances, and actions of crossing, turning, stepping and whirling, all in the context of a revolving 'mandala'. In the last phase of the Tibetan sequence, the dancers close in towards the centre of the circle, stepping, hopping and spinning, and then, turning, they dance out again to the periphery. If traced on the floor, their feet would mark a flower-petal pattern.

In addition to attending to physical actions and spatial relationships, practitioners also maintain an inner visualisation which involves the four elements and carries the intention to 'eliminate the ego' (Núñez, 1996: 103).

This is a complex vehicle for meditation-in-movement; it both supports and challenges the participant's capacity to stay present in a whirling and highly dynamic experiential process.

Deconditioning of Perception

The repetitive rhythms, changing dynamics, and complex, counter-intuitive actions of Citlalmina act to decondition habitual motor patterns (Middleton, 2001: 54–56). As in Grotowski's work in Theatre of Sources, this deconditioning of the body is associated with the 'deconditioning of perception'. Grotowski writes,

Habitually, an incredible amount of stimuli are flowing into us [...] but we are programmed in such a way that our attention records exclusively those stimuli that are in agreement with our learned image of the world. In other words, all the time we tell ourselves the same story. Therefore, if the techniques of the body, daily, habitual, specific for a precise culture, are suspended, this suspension is by itself a deconditioning of perception. (Grotowski, 1997:257–58)

We can compare this somatic approach to perception with that discussed above. In MSA, the practitioner's meditative engagement in sustaining still or very slow-moving

bodily forms opens up a space in which to develop clear sight of the difference between the body's experiential reality and the ego-projections which we normally mistake for it. In Citlalmina, a fast-moving dance sequence takes the practitioner through motor-behaviours which awaken the bodymind by replacing known protocols with unfamiliar movement pathways, thereby arousing a heightened degree of somatic awareness. This alteration in the relation between mind and body ripples out into an alteration in the relationship between bodymind and environment, since the dancers are maintaining their proximity to one another and to the spatial parameters of the circular mandala.

This experiential and perceptual shift can be characterized as a development away from an ontological duality of mind and body towards a state of non-duality. The psychologist and theatre director, Etzel Cardeña has spoken of such a state, as experienced in Núñez's work,

Dual consciousness is one in which your consciousness is separate from your body, separate from others, separate from the surrounding environment. While working [with Núñez and similar practitioners] this separate dual consciousness starts breaking down at times. [...A]t one point there will be no observing self that is separate from the action that is occurring. [...]f there is a movement that has to happen [...], instead of a thought preceding the action there is a consciousness in action, or an action in consciousness. (Cardeña in Middleton, 2001: 53)

Such a condition of integration between, and fluency in, consciousness and action is of great value to the actor, allowing as it does the spontaneity and unimpeded expressive freedom of the 'organic bodymind' introduced earlier.

According to the Japanese philosopher, Yuasa Yasuo, this condition—called 'bodymind one-ness' in Zen (Yuasa, 1993: 21)—is not ontologically present without training; since, before training, 'mind and body are lived *dualistically*' (Yuasa, 1993: 26). The oneness of body-mind, in which, Yuasa says, 'There is no gap between the movement of the mind and that of the body' (Yuasa, 1993: 25–26) is an achievement brought about by assiduous practice. The nature of that practice has been explored by Yuasa in his work on 'self-cultivation' (Yuasa 1987; Yuasa 1993).

CULTIVATION

Yuasa is writing in a Japanese Mahayana context, in which self-cultivation methods, including artistic disciplines (such as Noh Theatre; 1993: 25–27) have had particular cultural significance. His model of self-cultivation, however, is more broadly applicable, and relates to a mind-body paradigm which he describes as "running through the Eastern intellectual tradition" (1993: 7). His schema explores the Eastern mind-body paradigm by articulating a level of functioning (not present in Western physiology) that Nagatomo says 'roughly corresponds to the "subtle body" (*sukṣma śarīra*) of which Yogic tradition speaks' (Nagatomo 1992: 268), and which is a key feature of Vajrayana Buddhism. Here, the correspondence between Yuasa's bodymind schema and the subtle

body of Vajrayana Buddhism will be taken to be sufficiently strong for us to incorporate aspects of Yuasa's discussion.

The subtle body plays a key role in Vajrayana Buddhism through the Tantric practices of inner yoga. Geoffrey Samuel describes these as,

the various 'subtle body' practices involving flows of subtle substances, particularly *prāna* or (subtle) breath, along inner channels (Skt. *nāḍī*) meeting at a series of circles or centres (*cakra*), of which the best known are those located along the spinal column. (2012: 30)

Noting the importance of mind-body cultivation in the achievement of Buddhahood, Samuel speculates that in Western terms, we might see Tantric practices as a means of 'achieving mastery over the central nervous system and the internal hormonal flows of the body' (2012: 68). It is precisely this alignment of the phenomenology of the subtle body with a Western physiological frame that Yuasa attempts.

For Yuasa, there are two layers of consciousness—bright consciousness, which is self-conscious and capable of bringing awareness and volition to some aspects of bodily experience (for example, motor control); and 'dark consciousness' which underlies the bright, is not capable of self-consciousness, and which relates to those aspects of our experience which go on without our direct perception of them. Yuasa's dark consciousness relates in part to the psychoanalytic unconscious but equally to the functioning of the autonomic nervous system (Yuasa, 1987: 4–6, 122). It is also related to the Buddhist notion of 'no-mind' and is, in fact, seen as the ground for all of these aspects of being (Kasulis in Yuasa, 1987: 5).

For Yuasa, cultivation practices co-ordinate the relationship between bright and dark consciousness, bringing increasing levels of our being into bright consciousness, and bringing the directive force of bright consciousness to those aspects of our operating which would otherwise be influenced by complexes, ideas and forces seemingly beyond our control. Kasulis points to meditation on the breath as an example of bringing bright consciousness to dark consciousness; 'Once the route has been opened', he writes, 'further possibilities of interaction develop' (Yuasa, 1987: 6–7). And, significantly, 'For the bright consciousness to enter the dark, a psychophysical path is needed' (Yuasa, 1987: 6).

We can compare Yuasa's dark consciousness to Reginald Ray's use of the term 'Soma'. Ray also describes the body that is revealed through practices of deepening somatic awareness as characterised by 'darkness' (2008: 12), and in contrast to the head-centred, 'highly conceptual... "daylight consciousness"' (2008: 68).

Ray has noted that within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there are two distinct paths of meditation; 'The first method, by far the most common in the Tibetan Buddhism taught in the West, is based on the labeling, thinking, agenda-driven functioning of the left-brain' (Ray, 2016a: 187). The second, he writes,

...less well-known but characteristic of the yogic practices considered the most advanced in Tibetan Buddhism, is based on entering and identifying with the Soma. By *Soma* I mean not only our physical body, but also the entire

neurological network within which it is embedded, including the right brain and the subcortical regions... (Ray, 2016a: 187–188).

Both Mudra Space Awareness and Citlalmina have their origins in this second body-based meditational approach, in which the ‘dark’ neurological dimensions of the bodymind are directly targeted.

Although neither MSA nor Citlalmina explicitly engage practitioners with visualization of the anatomy of the subtle body (the nadis, chakras, central channel), the forms may be seen to offer experiences through which the subtle body or Soma comes vividly into awareness. As in the somatic meditation of Tibetan yoga we are put ‘in touch with the fire of direct experience’ (Ray, 2014: 165).

The fast, dynamic movements of Citlalmina create a particularly heightened energetic effect, which, in 1990, was investigated by scientists at the NASA Biosphere Project. Interested in techniques which could be used to sustain human life within the closed Biosphere eco-system, they examined the neurophysiological effects of Citlalmina (Núñez, 1996: 103–106). Núñez explains,

As the performer flows with [the dance], he is charged with energy. Certain subtle fluids are activated in our bodies through movement, and these fluids, together with consciously generated endorphine, produce in us a sensation of glowing brightness which purifies and invigorates the organism. These are the benefits of meditation in motion (Núñez, 1996: 103).

The inner processes which Núñez describes are seen by him to operate beyond the level of the gross body. These are not merely the results of physical exercise, but rather an activation of effects at the level of the subtle or energy body. Yuasa points out that Western exercise and sport aims at ‘enhancing the capacity of the motor organs’ but is not correlated with ‘the organs regulated by the autonomic nervous system’ (Yuasa, 1993: 60). Yogic and meditational cultivation practices involve this second, subtle level of the bodymind.

Translating the Dharma

Trungpa and Núñez’s forms might be seen as *translations* of practice from a Buddhist to a theatrical training context, insofar as they continue to function as *cultivation* practices, reconditioning the bodymind experience of the practitioner, deconditioning perception, and dilating awareness of the subtle dimensions of our being. This process requires that the practitioner performs the practices in particular ways, since mere physical athleticism in Citlalmina, or superficial presence in Mudra Space Awareness, would not lead to engagement with Ray’s Soma or Yuasa’s dark consciousness.

The practitioner must operate on several levels simultaneously (and synchronously), bringing awareness to outer physical and inner energetic protocols, and to mental imagery, whilst maintaining an open awareness that embraces both the bodymind and the wider environment. The core and crucial attentional modality in MSA and Citlalmina is a focused and open awareness. Attention on the body does not entail fixation on a single bodily part (or series of singular parts), but rather the practitioner continually cultivates a global apprehension of the whole. Further, the practitioner

enters into a relationship with their unfolding experience which is neither instrumental nor controlling. Rather, the invitation is to inhabit the sensory field of the arising present moment without interference from the conceptual mind.

When such a quality of mindful attention is brought to the energetic designs of MSA or Citlalmina, the practitioner may enter into an intense encounter with reality, as, and through, the body. The ontological experience offered through these forms is one that is significantly different from daily experience of consensual reality. The boundaries of mind and body, body and space, form and emptiness become more permeable; in Worley's words, 'an empty but bright spaciousness appears' (Worley, 2016: 110).

David George has suggested that Buddhist and performance ontologies share a number of common aspects, including this destabilizing of solidities (George, 1999). In performance, as in Buddhist philosophy, selves, realities, truths, matter, and permanence become lived questions. Like the Buddhist, the performer, in George's presentation, recognises the constructed nature of reality, and exists in a between-space, a Middle Way which transcends binaries. Performance training, of the kind taught by Worley and Núñez, can be seen as an ontologically transformative process, enabling the actor to be fully present in the dynamic emptiness of the creative moment.

Chogyam Trungpa saw the theatre as having the potential 'to make a contribution which would be extraordinarily powerful' (Trungpa, 2004: 667). He imagined that 'we could combine the bodhisattva and yogic practices in our theater work' (Trungpa, 2004: 668). As the dualism of mind and body dissolves in lived experience through psychophysical cultivation, so too perhaps other dualisms and reified appearances also dissolve. In this way, it may be that some of the insights of the Buddhist path can be translated into the secular domain of contemporary theatre training through the vehicle of embodied practice.

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