PULSE

A Physical Approach to Staging Text

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Dramatic Art (Direction) (by Research)

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I hereby certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text, this research paper, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Dramatic Art (Direction)(by Research) comprises only my original work.

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Tanya Gerstle
10th October 2008
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Disclaimer

Pulse began as a concept that could not have been developed without intense collaboration. Every Improvisation class and experimental workshop I ran from 1991 to 1998 enabled me to begin developing the form. The performers who trained with me at The Actor’s Centre, Culture Lab and The Performance Space in Sydney and those who participated in the Canberra Intensives all contributed to the early development of Pulse. The student actors of the VCA School of Drama who trained in my intensive Pulse Labs and collaborated in productions I directed from 2000 to 2007 took this structure of training to its present level of sophistication and gave me insight into possible interactions between Pulse and text.

In June and August of 2006, the participants of the Pulse Intensive and the Creative Development interrogated the rehearsal possibilities of Pulse, helping me to frame the process for the YES Performance Text. They were: Ella Watson-Russell, Stephen Phillips, Edwina Wren, Matthew Crosby, Deborah Leiser-Moore, Katherine Hicks, Matthew Crosby, Konstantinos Tsetsonis, Darren Natale, Anica Koprivec, Grant Cartwright, James Saunders, Josh Hewitt, Danielle Carter, Nicki Fearn, Adam Pierzhalski and Sarah Cathcart.

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All these artists have contributed selflessly and passionately to the interrogation of performance process because they are devoted to theatre as an art form. It is their collaboration that has enabled the Pulse process to exist.

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INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this processual investigation was my ongoing pre-occupation with the search for a way of creating a dynamic, energized text-based theatre. I wanted to develop a rehearsal process that would support a spatial and physical approach to linear narrative text which could then be transferred to its staging. Having already developed an improvisational training called Pulse, I was interested to see what would happen if I adapted its Principles into a rehearsal process and applied it to a Film text*. Could Pulse be extended into the world of text, narrative and character?

The practical component of this research focused on consolidating the Pulse training, on developing a rehearsal strategy based on its Principles and then staging the consequent Performance text** with its particular spatial and visual language. I have attempted to track this investigation and then describe and analyze the form that emerged. The key aims of this thesis are; to articulate the nature of Pulse and situate it within the discourse of current performance practice and humanistic principles, to examine the adaptation of Pulse from an ensemble training and improvisation tool, to its employment in rehearsal as a process towards character development and staging, to elucidate how Pulse shifted when it collided with a film text, and to explicate the impact of Pulse upon the screenplay*** of the film YES.

“The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs and judgements.”

In order to articulate this research I have used a heuristic process, which involves the incorporation of creative self-processes and self-discoveries; biographical background, knowledge accrued from years of teaching-led research, journal entries and analysis of a specific theatrical project. I have attempted to fuse memory, critical discourse and current performative discoveries to arrive at a creative synthesis.

* Film text refers to the screenplay and the visual impact of the cinematography and performances. It includes all the layers of the Film viewing experience.
** The Performance Text is the outcome of the meeting between the screenplay and the Pulse process. The Performance text includes the words, the actions of the actors, the light and soundscapes that fuse to create physical, aural and visual stage images.
*** Screenplay refers only to the language that is spoken in the film.
SECTION ONE

What is Pulse?

Doing theatre is a question of passion: the reward is not assured at any level. So it involves consciously putting oneself in danger, and by the way one never knows what the extent of the danger is, without a guarantee of any benefit or that anything will be found.\(^2\) 

Helene Cixous

_**Pulse is a shared language for the improvising ensemble. Like a group of jamming jazz musicians, the ensemble of improvising performers plays solo and together. United by a set of performance and compositional principles they respond to external sources and internal impulse, where the performer’s entire instrument is available to create image and sound. It allows the ensemble to create structured, non-linear narrative improvisations. When they begin the Pulse, they have no idea what will emerge. They are attempting to allow the piece to evolve organically; to work from a place where the unconscious and conscious meet, to synthesise inspiration with technical understanding. The only structure that exists for them is a shared language.**  \(^3\)_

Teaching Notes

**Embedding the Principles**

The shared language of Pulse is developed through repeated practical investigation. An ensemble begins from a still point in the empty space and the Performance Principles are introduced through the framework of four fundamental actions; running, walking, standing and falling. Side coaching during and debriefing after each Pulse connects these principles to the kinaesthetic experience. Using the four actions, each individual becomes aware of, begins to recognise, and eventually applies the Performance Principles: sustaining action, development, climax, Jo Ha Kyu, repetition, contrast, patterns and clusters. In order to respond to the group, each performer is constantly in the centre of their own performative action (in the micro), and aware of what the whole

\(^*\)These terms, which constitute the Principles of Pulse, will occur throughout this dissertation as they do throughout the training. They are constantly repeated and become the short hand for communication with the performers in side coaching. For further explanation of how they are specifically used in the Pulse context refer to Appendix Three.
piece needs (in the macro). This dual awareness is the beginning of the emerging ‘composer’ within the performer, and it is how a dialogue between the co-existing ‘performer/actor’ begins. This will be elaborated upon in relation to working with narrative text.

The layering of this kinaesthetic experience embeds a shared understanding amongst the ensemble and the momentum of the work takes the performers to the next level. The taking on of the next layer of the work is always initiated from the floor. Concepts and principles cannot be imposed. Only when the performer’s instrument has absorbed and integrated a Principle can the group move forward. This is always a challenge with collaborative processes, but as with all ensemble practice, those who are ready first will push the group forward and determine the rate of absorption.

In the next phase, the performers are made aware of the formal elements evolving, such as solos, duets and chorus. Here the ‘composer’ begins to be activated. ‘Working in parallel’* and ‘breaking the fourth wall’* are particular approaches to the use of the playing space in relation to the audience. These are introduced and re-enforced during this practical immersion.

The notion of the ‘composer’ is explored through the introduction of Compositional Principles:* silence and stillness, units of action, recurring motifs, architecture of space, depth of field, juxtaposition, layering, development to climax, dynamic tension, signifiers of emotion and performative gestures.

By beginning to work in a non-literal realm where any creative action is appropriate, the performer will begin to, not block or control, but edit and compose their artistic response to impulses. They begin to understand the process of composition. The mind joins the physical and sensory response and begins to store material that can be brought back at any time. The act of composing has begun.4

* When I refer to the ‘composer’ I mean that aspect of the performer, which allows them to effect total commitment to action, while simultaneously selecting and organizing the material they are creating. This involves a ‘tight-rope’ balance between spontaneity and control. Adrian Cairns refers to the actor’s split attention, “where he plays being a character at the same time as watching himself:” the objective consciousness, watching the subjective consciousness. “The Zen comment on this is that true mind is watching mind.” 5

* See Pulse Terminology, Appendix Three
The four fundamental actions, running, walking, standing and falling, now remain as tools for structural cohesion, but an expanded vocabulary of performative gestures and signifiers of emotion is taken onto the floor. This allows for greater possibilities of composition, but the opportunities for choice of action still remain contained. The performative palate has enlarged to encompass both physical and vocal action (sound). This phase allows the ensemble to practice the Performance Principles, integrate the Compositional Principles and combine the kinetic and vocal layers. Each new element entering the space needs to be integrated slowly into the expanding language of the ensemble. If changes happen too fast the steady development of the ensemble language can crash. If this happens the group returns to the fundamentals and begins to integrate the elements again.

With the introduction of performative gestures and signifiers of emotion, metaphoric meaning emerges as a compositional tool. Members of the ensemble look for a theme that will emerge, or try to ‘smell’ the dramatic potential in order to develop the material using the Principles. For example, a duet may deliver a unit of action involving, running, hugging, falling and crying. The ensemble becomes aware of this as content, and tries to play or improvise with it. Running becomes chasing; hugging may be loving or imprisoning; falling may allude to death or escape; and crying may be a response to fear, loss, love or betrayal. The performers are not constructing a narrative but are free-associating based on Compositional Principles, and simply responding from impulse with commitment to action. It is the viewer that interprets metaphoric images. Each viewer relates to what they see from their own perspective. The audience enters the work as a witness and is an integral part of the creative experience. The witness gives the Pulse its meaning and the Pulse performers include an awareness of the audience in the choices they make.

The ensemble brings improvised language onto the floor to layer the physical imagery. Language is treated in a similar way to the physical and vocal actions and the same Principles are applied. For example, a unit of action might involve repeating different phrases changing the order, and a solo could be a storytelling monologue. The physical actions and verbal actions can then be juxtaposed by an individual or by the group. For

* See Pulse Terminology, Appendix Three
example, a performer may move in a way that is not congruent with what they are saying, or, during an individual’s static monologue about grief, the ensemble may be dancing and laughing. The palette has expanded now to include any action, the making of sound, speaking and singing. The structure is held and the form is made through the application of Pulse Principles. Each stage of the work presents a new layer of complexity. As the early Principles are embedded, the next layer of awareness and application is demanded of the performer. As the work progresses, there is an increase in the complexity and sophistication of performative actions (physical, vocal and verbal), and in the development of content.*

The next stage of this process involves the ensemble responding to specified theatrical elements such as light, sourced sound and objects.** These elements interact with the Pulse as external generative sources influencing content and form. The ensemble members operating sound and light, apply the same Compositional Principles. Performers as well as sound and light operators are Pulsing together.

*Pulse challenges the performer to act on impulse with total conviction and to make decisions in action. It develops within the performer an acute sense of composition, spatial awareness and the understanding of how, what and when to contribute to 'the whole'. Performers are simultaneously the creators and the creation*

A Pulse happens in ‘real time’. As with all performance improvisation, the creation of it and the playing of it happen simultaneously as the audience experiences it. Nachmanovitch remarks, “Memory and intention (which postulate past and future) and intuition (which indicates the eternal present) are fused.”

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* See Pulse Terminology, Appendix Three

* The layering of kinaesthetic experience however, is not necessarily a linear process. Going back to fundamental actions and re-layering the Principles may have to take place several times in the embedding of the group language. As the complexity of the work builds, the ‘composer’ must be activated consistently in order for the performer to be connected to the collective improvisational structure developing.

** Several down lights that illuminate only sections of the playing space, and a combination of lights that can light the whole space need to be rigged. Ensemble players take turns to learn where the lights are on the board so they can keep their eyes on the playing floor. Similarly, a play-list of Sourced Sound including music of different genres; instrumental, songs with lyrics and sound effects is made for the performing space. Ensemble players learn the play-list in order to apply Compositional Principles to the use of sound in relation to the evolving Pulse. Furniture, props or costume elements may also enter the playing space in this phase. Any object will be a generative source and a provocation in an empty space. They are used with discretion.
Once all principles and concepts have been kinaesthetically embedded and the ‘composer’ has been activated, Pulse can be applied to any context and played with in different environments. The size of group can range from two to thirty, the shape and nature of the space can be reduced or expanded and a generative element can be anything that stimulates the imagination. Pulse Principles can be used in other performance activities such as Contact Improvisation* and can be experimented with in daily activities such as conversation. Joseph Campbell states that, “there is no matter; everything is the field. The separations and limitations are in our own minds.” 9 Defining the training as a linear progression is an inadequate way of describing the practical process. Training by its nature involves focusing on single aspects of technique to ensure a detailed understanding. The training of Pulse Principles, however, can only happen in the doing of Pulse. All concepts and Principles are inter-dependent.

**Philosophical Principles**

Impulse: To believe in the impulse and decision, be it physical or conceptual, without recourse to consideration. To react spontaneously confident of ability and judgment with assertion, power and strength. To maximize physical reactions with no thought for anything outside the present situation. 10

Cardiff Laboratory Handbook

The use of the term Pulse stems from the notion of Impulse. I wanted to focus on the body’s intelligence, instinct and intuition to access the imagination, to close the gap between ‘the idea and the action’.

**Pulsate v.i. to expand and contract rhythmically; to vibrate; quiver.** 11

When improvisers are in ‘flow’ they respond and receive, offer and surrender, initiate and serve. The rhythmic waves of the Jo Ha Kyu are the ensemble’s score.

**Pulse n. the underlying force of life, feeling.** 12

We know an improvisation is ‘alive’ if the performers are taking risks, if the danger of it dying is present in each moment.

**Pulse v.i. to be full of energy and excitement.** 14

A performer must commit with their whole psychic, physical, emotional and imaginal being to work collaboratively within a Pulse. In order for the blood to pump, the heart to

* Contact Improvisation, a response to highly structured, pre-determined forms of performance, ‘is a duet form, in which partners share the demands and gifts of weight and momentum… The structure of the improvised duet is basically to sense the information about one’s own movement and one’s partner’s movement through touch and constant awareness of gravity.’ 13
beat and the Pulse to be strong all members of the ensemble must be in a state of heightened awareness.

**Pulse n. the sentiments, opinions or attitudes current among a particular group.**

To improvise successfully with a Pulse ensemble, is to work with a shared ‘language’ in a group of like-minded artists. Working ‘from the heart’ allows for surprising meetings on the rehearsal floor. When the work is honest and open it has the greatest impact.

Members of the Pulse ensemble prepare individually and as a group to be able to work with heightened awareness and cohesion. The fundamental actions of running, walking, standing and falling, become an active meditation for the group to mark the commencement of work. Preparation as a ritual “concentrates the mind on the implications of what you are doing”. It enables the performer to make a transition from their involvement in everyday activities to a heightened state of attention.

The Pulse space always begins as an empty space. It is available to be a metaphor for whatever ‘world’ the Pulse conjures. Habitual social behaviour is not encouraged in the playing space, which reinforces a code of behaviour based on a conscious respect for the space, the work, the group and the ‘self’. “A sacred space is any space that is set apart from the usual context of life…In sacred space, everything is done so that the environment becomes a metaphor.”

*The playing space is sacred. Yet there are no taboos. Loud noise and profanities are permitted in this space. It is sacred in the sense that spirit moves in it.*

With experienced Pulse performers the ‘self’ or self-consciousness disappears. They are inspired to make associations based on spontaneous compositions and can work in a fluid, mercurial way. Their field of action starts to feel inevitable. Within the given parameters it seems there are no choices. The mind has ceased to impose, it does not control or dictate. “Buddhists call this state of absorbed, selfless, absolute concentration *Samadhi*…. The Sufis call this state *fana*, the annihilation of the individual selfhood.”

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this a state of ‘flow’. In deep concentration where the performer’s consciousness is fully active, they lose the awareness of self, and people have reported to have experienced a ‘transcendence of self.’ This can be an intoxicating state and once experienced is desired again and again. Ironically, it cannot be achieved through wanting and only with commitment to the moment and whatever is
evolving will the state of ‘flow’ return.” In an article for New Theatre Quarterly titled ‘Zen and the Art of Acting,’ Adrian Cairns talks about the “paradoxical difficulty in the art of acting – the harder you try, the more technical effort expended very often the worse the result.” 21 This is especially true for a Pulse ensemble, as the structure holding a Pulse is so tenuous. If a performer does not surrender to what is evolving, if they try to manipulate others or impose their will on the composition, the Pulse will ‘stop beating’. A Pulse performer must constantly embrace paradox and “practice relentlessly without ever trying.” 22

In writing about improvisation and the arts, musician Stephen Nachmanovitch speaks of the “creative process as a spiritual path”.23 When he discovered improvisation he “began to live a life that was self-creating, self-organizing and authentic”.24 During the Pulse training, performers often experience a perceptual shift. They perceive their entire environment as a canvas and Pulse is a part of every living moment. They are in a constant state of awareness, receptivity and initiation: a state of mind “taught and strengthened by improvisation”. 25 As Nachmanovitch says, “we can depend on the world being a perpetual surprise in perpetual motion. And a perpetual invitation to create.” 26

**Ethics and Collaborative Practice**

One actor, instead of necessarily competing with another, instead of trying to take attention away from him, would instead support the other…There comes a point where you no longer know which actor initiated the action; they are simply together. 27

Joseph Chaikin

“The process of collaboration is the work of an ensemble,” 28 says Joseph Chaikin. So what is collaboration within the Pulse ethic? There is always discrimination and resistance when a group of eclectic creators come together, but when challenges to

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*In his book Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman points out that “flow is a state of self-forgetfulness, the opposite to rumination and worry” and that when absorbed in a task there is a loss of self-consciousness. “In this sense moments of flow are egoless,” Goleman remarks that there are several ways to enter flow. “One is to intentionally focus a sharp attention on the task at hand; a highly concentrated state is the essence of flow.” The preparation towards this level of intense concentration demands discipline but once the focus starts to lock in, “it takes off on a force of its own.”* 29
offers are made during a Pulse, they can be resolved through action by embracing, dismantling and thereby transforming them. Often, in collaborative processes, a work session can be sabotaged before it has begun by verbal resistance to a proposed idea. In the structure of the Pulse process, once the work begins there is no stopping for discussion, and therefore judgment and justification do not take hold. A group armed with this ‘ensemble language’ can enter a space in silence. One member may begin to move, another joins them, and then another. A facilitator or director can feed in stimuli or sources and give direction or feed lines. Bogart states that, “in the theatre we often presume that collaboration means agreement.”  

She believes “that too much agreement creates productions with no vitality, no dialectic, no truth. Unreflected agreement deadens the energy in rehearsal…without resistance there is no fire.”  

In Pulse, the performer uses their resistance as a generative source and turns it into dramatic conflict. All friction is transformed into action.

When Pulse collaborative practice meets a production process the ethical parameters of the rehearsal culture expand. Pulse is a democratic process. It is non-hierarchical in the sense that all ensemble members, actors, director, light and sound artists contribute during the process and all offers are equally valid. The performers/technicians/creators are aware of all aspects of the process from inception through to performance and are autonomous and central to the production process. Design aspects are developed organically through the rehearsal weeks and consequently by the end of the process all theatrical elements are already in place. The production week of rehearsal does not involve putting all the elements together but is used to massage and perfect the typically complex outcome. Pulse allows for this synthesis to occur as all elements are present in the room from the beginning of rehearsal and are interwoven simultaneously. The design aspects are not created independently, by designers who bring conceptual plans to the project before rehearsal begins. The design of space, light and sound of the piece happens incrementally as the rehearsal progresses. This fundamental feature of the process will be discussed in greater detail during the analysis of the YES production process.
Performance with Purpose

Why theatre at all? Is it an anachronism, a superannuated oddity, surviving like an old monument or a quaint custom? Why do we applaud, and what? Has the stage a real place in our lives? What function can it have? What could it serve? What could it explore? What are its special properties? 32

Peter Brook

The Performance Improvisation format allows Pulse performers to ‘speak’ authentically and passionately about what matters to them. They need to be in dialogue with their values, beliefs and convictions, and to understand where the contradictions lie. As artists ‘in the first person’ and not interpreters, they have a responsibility to provoke, confront and challenge the personal, political and social landscape of our privileged and complacent culture.

Ensemble Practice and Rehearsal Culture

Peter Brook describes his ‘ensemble language’ developed through improvisational exercises as a “collaborative weaving of an invisible network and the psycho-somatic integration that develops transparency.” 33 Similarly, the Performance, Compositional, Philosophical and Ethical Principles of Pulse already outlined, create a shared understanding or ‘ensemble language’ constituting the Pulse rehearsal culture. Ensemble practice is about the continuity of working with the same group of performers, so there can be a possibility of developing a time efficient and yet more profound process. Chaikin writes, “The collective effort of theatre requires a special continuity in order to grow.” 34 As I discovered during The Pulse Intensive*, a disparate group of performers can work effectively if they have at some time been trained in Pulse. They immediately share a ‘language’ of process and can work with ensemble consciousness as if they had been in continuous practice together.

Outside the functionality of Pulse as a training and rehearsal tool, it is intrinsically a satisfying way to work. If a rehearsal room is a blueprint for a community, then Pulse is

*The Pulse Intensive was the first stage of my practical research. It took place over two days (4 sessions of 3 hours each) with the aim to fast track the layering of all Principles and see how quickly the ‘ensemble language’ could be established. For some participants, this work was completely new and others had not done it for many years. There were, however, about 8 performers who had never worked together before but had trained in Pulse in different ensembles over a period of eight years. The fluency with which they improvised together was impressive. The shared ‘language’ gave them a working framework but also created a trust in each other, which allowed them to quickly take conceptual leaps and significant physical and emotional risk.
a model for co-operation, building upon ideas, honouring difference and diversity, utilizing different strengths, listening, receiving and yielding. With ensemble ethics, a performer must be willing to work within the process for the good of the whole, for the piece itself and not for their own ego.

As the Pulse Principles become integrated and embedded within the performer, these generic skills influence their ability to relate to others within social settings. The ability to listen and respond enhances the improvisation of conversation in everyday life, and often the development of heightened awareness gives a changed perspective on situations outside the work. There is a psychotherapeutic spin-off with most improvisatory work but with the Pulse process it is enhanced.

Only artists united by true sympathy into an Improvising Ensemble can know the joy of unselfish, common creation.35

Michael Chekhov

Qualities of the Pulse Performer

The Pulse performer needs to have a strong ego structure in order to execute the work without holding back, but at the same time they must be able to surrender. They must have the capacity to understand their function in the context of ‘the whole’ and be able to participate accordingly. Their ‘instrument’ has to be fluent and robust yet have a mercurial quality enabling transformation. They have to be transparent and fragile whilst receptive and responsive. They need the capacity to be totally in the moment but at the same time anticipate the next. They have to be comfortable with ambiguity and understand they are constantly engaged in paradox.

The extra-ordinary feeling of connectedness or ‘flow’ when the adrenalin rush happens and the group spontaneously, seemingly miraculously, creates a coherent, powerful Pulse is unparalleled. But as Nachmanovich states “to do art only for the high feeling of completion and connectedness in the moment of inspiration would be like making love

* Anne Bogart works with the same objectives. As Eelka Lampe describes, “principles like noninterference, being open to what the other has to offer and letting go of the restrictive investments of the self have allowed Bogart to develop a non-hierarchical, kinesthetic composition technique which she calls Viewpoints.”36

** The performers’ ‘instrument’ is their entire performative being; the physical, vocal, emotional, imaginal and psychic qualities of the performer.
only for the moment of orgasm.”  

The hit and miss nature of an improvised Pulse is extremely erratic. Many factors must be aligned for it to work. A group needs to have a shared aesthetic, extensive skill, the right combinations of energies and compatibilities, as well as courage and imagination.

**Distillation of Principles**

“Practitioners have been trained within each other’s systems and then moved away from them.” Meeting the work of Lindy Davies was a major key to shifting Pulse into the realm of text. Davies has developed an approach for an actor to work with scripted text, which is also a production process that can be used to bring a dramatic text to the stage.

It consists of three stages, Dropping-In, Abstract and Blueprint. Davies describes Dropping-In, derived from the work of Kristin Linklater, as dropping words or thoughts into “the stillness of ourselves, and letting the meaning resonate until we find the impulse to speak from source.” Abstract will be described in this section and Blueprint, strongly influenced by Moshe Feldenkrais, is concerned with finding the form. “The actor searches for the movement pattern of the scene taking into account their character’s relationship to the space, other characters and the audience”.

As a trainer in a three-year acting curriculum led by Davies, I have taught her process to many generations of Melbourne actors. It was during this immersion that the strands of Pulse and certain aspects of the Davies’ Approach to Text merged.” Her theatrical ethics, her search for a kinaesthetic approach to process and her focus on impulse as a key to unlocking the actor’s imaginative response aligned with my own investigations. Davies proposes that, “we can create a sense of possibility, so that an integrated way of working, may become not a luxury, but a necessity.”

“Meyerhold and Chekhov had been former students of Stanislavski, Etienne Decroux and Jacques Le Coq studied with Copeau and Brook, Barba and Chaikin all worked with Grotowski in various contexts”. My intention here is not to place myself in the same context as such theatrical luminaries. I only intend to show how the transference of ideas leads to creative individuals taking alternative routes.

My continuous research into the Pulse performance practice rapidly accelerated once I moved into the framework of an intensive, tertiary actor-training programme. By introducing the work to students in their first year of study, I could build on it in their second and third years. Using this model, Pulse expanded and took on many forms. I was able to use it for training, in rehearsal and for performance making with actors who knew the Principles. Protected from the financial necessity of gaining audiences, and the prohibitive publicity and production costs, Pulse grew and developed in the ‘laboratory’ protected by an academic paradigm. (See Appendix Four)
The Davies Abstract (second stage of her process), “enhances the actor’s ability to work via suggestion and allusion. The actor investigates their subconscious connection between ideas, physical action, space and text”43 using scattered objects in the space. The actor relates to the objects in a non-literal and non-illustrative way, endowing them with sub-textual meaning (which contacts the metaphorical dimensions of the text), in order to find the ‘impulse to speak’. The actors investigate the language “experientially in order to reveal meaning rather than deciding on a meaning conceptually and then simply demonstrating it.” 44

The notion of Impulse as Davies describes it, involves “by-passing the rational self and allowing the visceral self to operate freely and fully. This means there is no gap between impulse and gesture, it is pure action.”45 Working ‘from impulse’ is the underlying precept of the Davies Approach to Text, as it is with Pulse. In Performance Pulse, however, the ‘composer’ must be present for the actor to understand their place in the image and be aware of creating structure. This is not a concern for Davies. The Abstract in her process is “for the actor to discover the text in their body,”46 and as a director she may not use any of this work. This is where Pulse diverges from the Davies approach. The Mapping phase of Pulse is also an ‘abstract’ process utilizing the idea of the actor working thought by thought in ‘extended time’. In Pulse, however, actors are searching for the physical metaphor behind the text and are aware of the images they are making. They have ‘internalized the audience’. It is this layer of rehearsal that produces the Performance text: the physical, theatrical form in the performance space.

From the more superficial levels of organization to those more intimate, the dialectic of improvisation and pre-meditation is the basis of stage life. It is its discontinuous breath. The whole theatrical profession, in its totality and in all its detail, can be analyzed in the light of this discontinuity. 47 Eugenio Barba
SECTION TWO

The Practical Research

The Generative Source

Why Choose a Film Text?

With cinema, because of the realistic nature of photography, a person is always in a context…it involves somebody being somewhere. Cinema cannot ignore the social context in which it operates….in the theatre, the imagination fills the space, whereas the cinema screen represents the whole, demanding that everything in the frame be linked in a logically coherent manner.

Peter Brook

Having previously adapted the narrative of an audio text to a theatrical space,* I was interested in working with narrative from another medium, where the story telling form was still linear, but where the writer’s choice of language and structure was not influenced by the idea of theatrical space. Such written material would necessitate an imaginative response to space and action. If a screenplay relies on photographic reality to contextualize the action of the narrative, I wanted to know what would happen if the text was applied to an empty theatrical space? Verbal descriptions of place, circumstance and character are usually woven into the exposition of a dramatic text. In film, a complex visual language replaces this. I wondered if the process of Pulse would liberate a film narrative or reduce its impact. Could the expressiveness of the performer’s body communicate layers of the story not experienced through the film? Using only theatrical tools and one space, a visceral, physical and aural landscape would have to be created so that an audience could still follow the story and experience the characters’ journeys to different geographical locations.

Why Choose YES as the Film Text.

To remain silent was impossible. But how to speak? Instinctively I turned to love and to verse. For love, ultimately, is a stronger force than hate; and verse-by virtue of its apparent artifice-paradoxically allows us to express the complexities of thought and experience in a distilled, natural way.

Sally Potter

*Five Kinds of Silence by Shelagh Stephenson
YES affected me profoundly on a socio-political level and as an artist I was inspired. Disturbed by the development of ‘the war on terror’, like Sally Potter I was searching for a way as an artist to respond to the unspeakable. How to humanize the demonization of ‘the other’? Potter had combined the economy of language found in film with the nature of heightened poetic text. The poetic form allowed for the distillation of thought as well as leaving space for the audience’s own interrogations. Potter comments, “poetry is simple and old, and direct – from Icelandic sagas and Sanskrit to ballads and hip-hop." There was a sense of the non-specific and a timelessness encapsulated by the verse. I felt it would lend itself to activating an audience’s imagination. Thematically, the ‘dance’ of the personal and the political was exquisite, a metaphor in content that could be mirrored by the form and style of Pulse.

In a letter to Potter, John Berger observes that, “the body is everywhere in your film...What the film affirms is the longing of the body to become, to step (however small the steps) towards another state of being.” I thought perhaps that the live physical presence of the actors’ bodies could realize that next step. The restrained emotional landscape of unspoken feelings seemed to lend itself perfectly to a physicalization of this deep undercurrent. Pulse is a process for the physical performer aiming to externalize a character’s inner world, so I suspected that the containment of sexual and violent tensions evident in the Film text would explode on the Pulse floor. This aspect became a major feature of both the process and its consequent outcome.

**The Consolidation of Pulse as a Process for Narrative Text**

In the following section I have outlined the four phases of the Pulse Rehearsal Process: Intuitive Investigation, Immersion, Mapping and Rendering. They were conceptualized during the Creative Development period and applied during the making of the YES Performance text.

**Intuitive Investigation**

Intuitive Investigation is the sensory and intellectual research necessary for the group to

*The Creative Development was the second phase of my practical research. For 6 days over a two-week period in August 2006, I worked on several sequences of the Film text with a Pulse ensemble. Most of the performers who worked on this phase had attended the Pulse Intensive in June 2006.*
embark on the journey together. In the first week of the YES rehearsal process, the mornings were dedicated to Pulse Training and the afternoons involved Intuitive Investigation culminating in each actor delivering a Performance Response.” This early phase coincides with Bogart’s process termed Source-work.” As Landau says, “Source-work is a way of lighting the fire for everyone to share.” It is in this phase that ‘indexing’ or a collaborative list making of the piece takes place. A functional thematic score (see below) is developed collectively to help deconstruct the overwhelming plethora of ideas and textual rhythms contained in the narrative and to break the script into sequences or units for rehearsal. Components of the score will involve whatever is pertinent to the genre of the piece. The score serves several functions for this process. Firstly, it creates a shared understanding and material to feed into the Immersion Pulse before the actors know their text, (assisting in their absorption of the emerging world). Secondly, in the Rendering phase, I use the score directorially to give me an overview of the function of each sequence in the organically emerging framework.

The YES score included; action (what is happening), content (themes and ideas), rhythms (the Jo Ha Kyu), time (day or night), place (locations), who (characters involved) and function (in the narrative). Apart from giving the ensemble an initial shared trajectory, its major function came towards the end of the third week of rehearsal. At this point in the process, the ensemble needed a sense of the whole as we had been working through the narrative in fragments. We needed to find an improvised flow, that might solve issues with transitions that I had been trying to ‘think solve’, and I wanted the actors to try a fluid, physical retrieval to see which physical images had been embedded from each of the Mapped units. The score enabled us to do a ‘run through’ of the kinetic map in the form of a Pulse. The result was a fifty-minute continuous movement piece based on the narrative of YES (See V. R. B – Chap 1/ B). This Pulse achieved the previously stated aims, but was also the major key to solving the staging transitions for the last sequences. I will discuss this in greater detail in the section on Making Filmic Montage Theatrical.

*A Performance Response is a short solo piece performed for the ensemble at the end of the first week of rehearsal. It is to be non-illustrative and gives insight into any aspect of the piece that has sparked the actor’s imagination or conscience. Any theatrical tools may be used (light, sound, audio visual).

**“Source-work is the time taken (before you begin rehearsing anything the audience is actually going to see on stage) to enter with your entire being into the world, the issues, the heart of your material.”
**Immersion: Internalizing the Score and the Text**

This phase of the process involves the actor physically ‘diving’ into the textual and aural material. As the text is fed onto the rehearsal floor, the actors intuitively unearth subtext whilst absorbing the unfolding world of the narrative. Sources that may be fed into the Pulse include; research material, the score, light, music, sound and the text of the sequence. The director can also feed in the shifts in the rhythm of the text, the beginning and end of beats, turning points and climaxes, the description of action and themes, as well as the function of character. In this way, the writer’s pre-occupations will emerge and the actors experience a kind of ‘kinesthetic script analysis’.* The actors’ physical responses are often unwittingly prospective and retrospective images from the storyline; and a resonance of the entire narrative begins to inform the characters’ relationships. The actors in this phase of the process are responding freely to external as well as internal sources.

**Mapping: Externalizing the Text**

Mapping involves the actors working through the narrative, thought by thought in ‘extended time’. The focus is now on verbalizing the text and using it to stimulate the physical imagination in a non-literal way. Mapping serves to create visual imagery for the physical map; to wed the thoughts represented by language to the actions, emotions and sensations experienced; and to give the actors a kinaesthetic experience of the text, the ideas and their relationships. The intention of this layer is to explore the integration between the verbal and physical world of the narrative. It is not purely a tool for the actor to build their character, as is often the case with rehearsal improvisation used to explore text-based material. An important aspect of this way of working, however, is that as this phase proceeds a character intuitively emerges. It is the physical actions of the actor that enables the character to evolve. By the end of this phase, ‘the character has found the actor’.

Even if the actors know their text by this stage, the director and the other actors still feed the text into the Pulse. This enables all ensemble members in the room to be focused

*This part of the process taps into the actor’s intuitive intelligence instead of entering the text through the intellect and dissecting it through discussion. Conceptually, Brook begins his process in a similar way. “His preparation of actors, realigns the assumed relationship of mind and body in Western cultures, reversing the conventional Cartesian hierarchy and traditional point of access to ‘meaning’.” Brook says, “it is always a mistake for actors to begin their work with intellectual discussion as the rational mind is not nearly as potent an instrument of discovery as the more secret faculties of intuition.”*
on the same moment. Familiarity with every thought in the narrative is each
participant’s responsibility and not just that of the actor speaking it. When a thought is
fed onto the floor, it gives the speaking actor’s acting partners a chance to be changed by
it in the moment before the actor speaks it. This means they are ready to receive
whatever physical interactions may happen to them, they can physically provoke their
speaking partner to help him/her find the impulse to speak and they get to experience the
content of the thought twice. Feeding text is a group responsibility. The director will
initiate it, but will have to pass the baton many times to serving actors in order to
conduct the other elements in the room. The director takes back the feeding when she
needs to implicitly direct through her delivery, usually through pace, for example,
leaving space for moments to develop or keeping the actor in an action by feeding a
stream of thoughts quickly.

Mapping throws up many acting challenges. If the actor is too focused on their physical
responses, ‘patterning’ occurs with the language: declaiming, emphasizing and shouting
words or phrases when the actor is in an extreme physical state is a tendency, which may
emerge when working with such physical intensity. Isolation of the body state and vocal
delivery is an important aspect of Mapping. It is this juxtaposition that allows for the
physical text at times to be read as the character’s internal state. The image of a
contorted body with a calm voice, for instance, enlarges the sub-textual use of subtle
body language found through ‘inside-out’ approaches. It is arrived at however, through
the inverse or ‘outside-in” approach. If the actor is too focused on the text, the body
defaults to behavioural gestures and the heightened physicality and extension of the
physical imagination is not balanced with the language. In this case, the text drives the
moment and the physical world is inert. Pulse actors have to be prepared and grounded
in the balance of the task in order to achieve congruence. This ability grows as the
Mapping phase gathers momentum.

Rendering: Finding the Form
Much of the physical language of the piece has been discovered through the Mapping
Phase, so Rendering becomes a combination of sifting and selecting thematic physical,
visual, aural and spatial imagery from the Immersion and Mapping Pulses. The sound
sources offered in the previous phases are made into a sound score. Spoken scenes are
staged by placing selected physical images where they are effective. This is usually
where they occurred in Mapping but not always. If not, it is the task of the character/actor to then find the bridge between the action and the character’s intention by working from the ‘outside-in’. This phase is a combination of physical, emotional and sensory retrieval for the actors and selecting and composing for the director. In this phase, the director and actors are consciously employing Compositional Principles such as layering (especially for the overlapping in transitions), simultaneous imagery, recurring motifs and juxtaposition in the shaping of the whole.

**Retrieval**

An important aspect of finding a complex physical map when working with text is ‘retrieval”. During the YES rehearsal period it became apparent when we started Rendering at the beginning of the third week, that filmed footage was an essential tool for retrieving the Mapped sequences. Although the actors notated their own sensory and emotional journey and transcribed the physical actions and gestures through description or image, the complexity of the physical landscape and the speed at which we needed to work, made it difficult for them to get onto the floor straight afterwards to repeat the kinetic patterns in order to later recall the physical pathways. Similarly, I needed to be able to respond to the moment and conduct the Pulse so I was not making my usual notations. The filmed footage became indispensable.

*Watched footage of Car Park with the two actors and made a verbal edit of the action to take onto the floor. We were able to pause the tape and talk through concepts and ideas, as well as rewind, replay and fast forward units of action to examine their origin and execution. Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 7*  

**The Simultaneous and Vertical Uses of Immersion, Mapping and Rendering**

Immersion, Mapping and Rendering are rehearsal tools, which may start out being applied to the narrative in a linear way and then are adapted to respond to the needs of the evolving material and the limitations of time and space. Each phase has a different function, as outlined above, and the director chooses when and how to employ them.

*With the Davies approach, ‘retrieval’ means that the actors have a written score of thoughts, feelings, images and sensations, a “mapping of inner associations,” which creates an internal pathway for the actors through the text.  

Notations of physical action to create a staging map, is the major function of the Pulse Mapping ‘retrieval’.  

During the YES rehearsal process I kept a journal observing the evolution of the work and reflected upon my research questions. Entries from the journal will be cited in the following sections.*
According to the type of material being dealt with, sequences demand different approaches. For example, when a monologue or duologue needs ensemble participation I would employ Immersion and Mapping simultaneously. The speaking actors are Mapping and the ensemble takes care of the space employing the awareness of Immersion.

At the beginning of Immersion, the actors are looking for connections, relationship, motifs and the style of the physical world. As Immersion progresses through the narrative there is an accumulation of experience, a shared history and motifs, and an increasing substance in their relationships. A pace and fluency is established and as the story accelerates they begin to anticipate where to go. At this point, the actors may need to access text in order to delve deeper. As the tools are a ‘shared language’, the actors and director can work intuitively to employ another layer whenever that is needed. During the YES rehearsal period for example, Immersion was not used as a layer on its own but became the daily preparation Pulse to enter each sequence for Mapping.

Rendering or repeating a unit of action to enable the framing of a composed moment, may be employed inside the Pulse to physically retrieve compositions whilst remaining in ‘flow’. This tool is employed so the actor does not stop or come out of the work and is able to continue moving forward afterwards. In the investigation and development of the physical world, the actors are predominately activating their ‘composer’, and as such the material may not have reached its performative potential. When moving seamlessly into Rendering at the request of the director, this is reversed. The repetition gives the actor the opportunity to invest more performatively, bringing commitment and other expressive layers to the image. A unit of action might be created in a Pulse, Rendered, then thrown back into the Pulse to find its application in space. As the actors now know the sequence, they can be performatively committed to it, allowing the ‘composer’ to again be activated, only this time working for a different intention.

At anytime within the ‘Pulse world’, the shared understanding of Principles and intentions of the layering process means that the work of the director may take the form of side coaching. By feeding Principles into the Pulse, either to create awareness or to
suggest the employment of them; they can be immediately transformed into action. The director’s pace, volume and timing of the moment to feed any source into the Pulse are read implicitly as direction. The director is then Pulsing with the actors.

When immersing in the Pulse ‘state’ the actors are protected by the illusion of an imaginary world, ironically, it may be an empty space with three theatre lights, however, anything can happen and the possibilities are limitless. This state also encourages awareness of the performative image in space as they are creating. It is a constant reminder to the ‘composer’ to think of the actor as part of a larger image.

**Rehearsal as Performance Pulse**

Anne Bogart’s Composition work uses the limitations of time and prescribed ingredients when working with actors. Similarly, there’s a certain urgency and heightened awareness that enters the investigation in Pulse. The imagination is ‘squeezed out’ of the actors and in this context the work becomes a sort of ‘rehearsal performance’. Conceptually speaking, in traditional theatrical creative processes, rehearsal and performance are separated. Rehearsal is investigation and performance is the expression of those discoveries. With the Pulse actor the discovery is being expressed performatively in that moment as a series of compositions responding to whatever sources are supplied. Rather than the actors feeling pressured to perform because of this, they say that the heightened intensity of the world and the theatrical elements supporting them, reminds them that they are part of a larger picture. They are only one aspect of the storytelling. This notion allows them to abandon themselves and focus on existing in the world with the other elements. It helps them be and respond rather than feel pressured to do.

*A group may be given a list of elements that must be included within a Composition. For example, actions, lines of text, objects, sounds and turning points; revelation of an object or an unexpected entrance. The group has twenty minutes to work up a Composition of six minutes duration. There are different models for the Composition work, but the parameters are similar. Compositions are responses to the text, outside of the text. “Bogart found that making compositions in short, intense bursts of time meant that the creators didn’t focus on ‘thinking’, but were busy in the doing. She created the composition structure so they could compose while working from impulse and intuition”*.  

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SECTION THREE

Pulse and its Impact on Film Form

In this section of the study I have focused on the major challenges faced in converting the film to the stage and how Pulse as a framework acted upon the artists involved to create the resultant form, style and shift in content. I will be referring to sequences from the Performance text and from rehearsal footage. It should be noted that not all rehearsal sessions were filmed and not all of those filmed were useable.

Process is dynamic: it’s the evolution that takes place during work. Systems are recorded as ground plans, not to be followed any more than rules of courtship can be followed. We can get clues from others, but our own culture and sensibility and aesthetic will lead us to a totally new kind of expression.

Joseph Chaikin

Most members of the ensemble had viewed the Film text before commencing rehearsal and came to the floor with a variety of impressions, assumptions and prejudices. It was difficult in the first phases of rehearsal for the actors, but primarily for myself, to let the imposing visual context of the film feed the imagination and not imprison it. My rational mind was distracted with trying to solve telephone calls and how to identify New York, Beirut, Belfast and Havana. During this time I wondered whether it might have been more effective if the ensemble had worked only from the screenplay with its scenic descriptions. I became very aware of the difference between a worded description (which engaged the imagination of the actors and left room for interpretation) and the photographic detail of the finite Film text, which did not. Whenever I tried to rationalize the staging challenges, I got stuck. The research framework became my essential guide; what happens to the Film text when it meets Pulse? Whenever I tried to impose conceptual control, I would simply return to this question, and in doing so was able to respond in the ‘spirit’ of Pulse. By letting go of

*A Chapter number which can be accessed by viewing the DVD – Yes: Memory Grab will refer to each sequence from the Performance text discussed. When the rehearsal footage is referred to, it can be found at the Chapter number mentioned on the DVD - Video Rehearsal Blog (V.R.B)

*Memory Grab is the term used by Romeo Castellucci to describe the outcome of filming his live stage works ‘12 Cite Creations’. I am borrowing his term, as it is an appropriate response to the filmed edit of the Performance text. The production was ephemeral, visceral and not designed to be shot for film. In the end this ‘memory grab’ can only suggest, prompt, stimulate and remind us of the impact of the live experience.
a pre-meditated individual vision for the staging (involving microphones, audio visual image and voice over tracks for each character), I was able to surrender to the process. By trusting the process, the structure and style of the piece began to miraculously emerge. Letting go of control in the early stages of rehearsal and allowing the work to evolve from within itself, is a frightening proposition for a director. Usually the evolution of the performance is driven and constructed by the directorial mind. By waiting, watching and immersing in the unknown I was liberated from the role of ‘creative manager’ and required to participate as a collaborative artist.

*It is becoming a creature unrecognizable as either the Film text or its adaptation in my head. Filmic separations of locations, details of status and time frames have melted. It is the story of a man and a woman. That is its universality.*

Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 12

**Implications for Casting**

I discovered during the Creative Development period that a particular type of body best writes this work. There must be a physical fluency in the performer and the ability to translate an imaginative response into a fluid, non-literal, physical form. The body needs to work poetically rather than prosaically. The depth, intensity, efficiency, risk taking and useable outcomes of this Pulse process were directly related to the history of the actors’ relationship to working with Pulse, together with the lyrical physicality of their own work. For those actors who had worked with me extensively and who embraced this way of working consistently, the Principles were already embedded and they could access the shared ‘language’ even though they may never have worked together before. One of the actors described it in this way, ‘when you are working with someone without those qualities you are searching for it. It feels like hard work. But when you work with another Pulse performer you enter the state and you simply find it, everything comes to you, you just have to catch it.’

This new understanding made it difficult for me to cast to type. I would have had to find actors, who not only had been trained by me in Pulse and had a physical lyricism,

*Commentary from Ella Watson-Russell who participated in all three stages of the practical research, during the Creative Development, August 2006.*
but who also visually represented the characters. Confronted by this ‘limitation of means’, I let go of any idea of adapting the Film text and re-visited the notion of ensemble practice. I chose actors who showed interest in this process, a group at the end of their training and two graduates. I hoped that the process of Pulse meeting the material would show us how the story needed to be told. The pale, Nordic looking actor would play a Lebanese man, being the most accomplished Pulse performer, and a dark haired woman would play the pale, blonde Westerner. The twenty-something actors would play all the characters, ranging in age from sixteen to eighty. I did not realize then what I now know. Casting for a lyrical, physical energy rather than casting to type in a reductive way is congruent with the notion of juxtaposition and the ethics of Pulse.

During the process I found that the Pulse actors’ physical neutrality allowed them to create the illusion of age and ethnicity. The visual script became more suggestive than descriptive. The neutral or ‘empty’ body worked in the same way that an empty space works. Whatever was placed on it became the landscape for the audience’s imaginings.

The Fluidity of Time and Space:

Dreams and Memories, Past and Present

If there is an art that has a structural complicity with the dream, it is the theatre.  
Helen Cixous

Pulse exploration in both the Immersion and Mapping phases leads to characters’ memories, fantasies and present actions being played out at the same time. Imaginary and existing figures share the same time and space, introducing the viewer to a world where there is no unity of time and space and all contexts are fluid. Many sequences contain metaphorically layered meanings due to this ambiguity. This is

"Metaphorical layering is found in most sequences. For example, Dead Dreams (Chap.10), comments on death in the pasts of He and She; the ‘small death’ of their orgasm, and the death that may occur if they ‘go to war’ with each other. In Heat in the Kitchen (Chap.12), an ‘imaginary’ woman shoots at the kitchen workers, while they drool over her. She might be a shared pornographic image or perhaps a personal fantasy (in their own minds). She symbolizes the paradox of pleasure and death. In the first moments of Past Revelations (Chap.14), He places She on the silver trolley, where He speaks of carefully slicing the ham, which he doesn’t eat, while seductively stroking her leg. In this one moment, He simultaneously represents his past and present self: himself as a doctor, a kitchen hand and her lover. The trolley is a kitchen bench, a surgeon’s table and a lover’s bed."
what makes the visual presentation of paradox possible. Theatrical performance
dictates time in nominating how long the viewing is, as opposed to visual art or
literature, where the viewer controls time. The nature of theatrical reality is that it
exists in time. Ironically, it defines a space of infinite possibilities. As Chaikin
observes “a theatre event should burn into time as a movement cuts into space. Time
is experienced only in terms of rhythm.” In his seminal text Ways of Seeing, John
Berger described how the invention of the camera isolated “momentary
appearances” and consequently destroyed the idea that “images were timeless.”
Berger states that, “the camera showed that the notion of time passing was inseparable
from the experience of the visual…it depended on where you were and when.”
Conventional film, works with separated time zones and time is linear, just as in
traditional theatrical narratives, while contemporary theatre including Pulse generated
performance, opens up the notion of spatial time.

This notion as a ‘staging language’ or convention is set up from the beginning of the
Performance text in the Cleaner’s Philosophy (Chap.2). The first integration of these
different time zones and performance realities happens in Sick Aunt (Chap.8). In the
Film text, the Husband and the Cleaner are in the Kitchen. The Cleaner is turning on
the dishwasher and the Husband reads the newspaper while speaking on the
telephone. In the Performance text, the Husband who exists in present time speaks as
if on the telephone whilst working on his computer. The Cleaner, who is crawling
towards the imaginary figure of the Aunt, who is collapsing in slow motion, is
invisible to him. The Aunt is also invisible to him, but not to the Cleaner, and the
Cleaner is invisible to the Aunt. Four different realities are being played in the space
simultaneously. When the Husband has left the stage, the Cleaner addresses the
audience and drags off the imaginary dead Aunt. In playing the scene this way the
character of the Aunt is introduced as a prospective phantom. The Aunt emerges
again in Seduction (Chap.9), when She tells a story from her childhood, and again in
the Ache of Emptiness (Chap.23), as the Aunt watches the dissolution of the couple’s
marriage. When she rises from her deathbed in the hospital, in Incensed Elegy
(Chap.26), we already know she is an imaginary figure, but this time she speaks. In
the narrative, she is dying of old age, although through the memory of She, we see her
as a woman in her forties, the way she looked when She was growing up in Belfast.
There are several layers of ambiguity in this presentation. Alternatively, in the Film
text; an old woman lies in a hospital bed; She sits at her bedside and moves around the room silently, while the audience hears the aged Aunt’s text in an Irish accent as a voice over.

**Recurring Motifs: Through-line of Character**

The fluidity of characters moving through time and space means that they have more stage time and are therefore more present, regardless of how much they speak. As mentioned with the Aunt, this sets up the convention of prospective and retrospective sightings of characters that are concerned with the unconscious thoughts of the protagonists. It is the nature of the Pulse process, which allows these parallel realities to take place. During the Mapping Phase, whenever a character is mentioned in a memory or is spoken about, the actor playing that character enters the space. Another example of this is the Goddaughter’s appearance in *Running to Survive* (Chap.15), as her mother confides in She about their troubled relationship. Neither of the women can see her as she hugs her godmother whom she admires and looks longingly at her mother who does not understand her. Towards the end of the sequence, She questions the Best friend about her Husband, as he appears in the space, creating a triangle with the three of them. It is not until *A Child’s Despair* (Chap.29), that we find out they are having an affair, but it is here that the seed has been sown in the viewer’s mind. No such ambiguities exist in the Film text. These continual sightings in the Performance text create character through-lines for actors with small roles. In the Film text, the Aunt and the Best friend have one scene each and the Goddaughter and the Husband only have two.

The Husband and Cleaner movement sequence is a recurring motif (seen in Chaps. 2, 7 and 8). The generative idea for its development came from the essence of several scenes in the Film text (screenplay pp. 2,9,34), where we get a sense of his utter loneliness and yet he is never alone. The germination of this unit of action took place in the Creative Development and a version of it appeared again in an Immersion Pulse during rehearsal (see V.R.B Chap. 1/C). The physical abstraction of this relationship as seen in the Film text was enough to suggest the essence of his despair, which he finally voices in *A Husband’s Confession* (Chap. 17).
Ensemble Players: Functions and Roles

To reinforce the notion of surveillance the individual actors of the ensemble act as the occasional witness half hidden behind the calico drops. At other times, without costume changes, they appear as waiters, embassy patrons, airport travellers, salsa dancers, Lebanese fighters and Irish mothers. In this capacity they are serving the telling of the narrative. As their characters, the actors weave themselves into scenes to counterpoint the emotional content (for example, the Aunt in *Sick Aunt* – Chap. 8), or to metaphorically suggest their character’s inner thoughts, (He and She, also in Chap. 8, walk in slow motion towards their first meeting).

Another feature of the ensemble fluidity is that occasionally an actor plays more than one function simultaneously. An example of this happens in *Past Revelations* (Chap. 14), when the actor playing the Husband is serving the scene by revolving the hospital trolley. In this sequence He accuses She of being less interested in him because he chooses to be a kitchen worker instead of a doctor. The server in this moment stands, and as their eyes meet He says, ‘The hero’s been reduced, down-sized. A lower kind of man.’ It is clear in this moment that we are witnessing an imaginary meeting between He and the Husband.

In the Performance text, the Cleaner “who performs the role of the Greek chorus,” is the only character to speak directly to the audience. In the Film, one Cleaner has text to open and close the narrative, but there are a variety of cleaners woven into the visual narrative making their presence felt by looking directly into the camera. In this way, they comment on the action and insinuate the underlying themes of the piece. They appear at the swimming pool, the laboratory, the kitchen and the hospital. In the Performance text, the audience identifies one character as the Cleaner. She is seen as the invisible observer of the Husband and the one who dresses and undresses She in preparation for the next scene. She disposes of the invisible dead Aunt and gathers the ensemble servers or ‘fellow chorus’ to do her bidding. She appears ubiquitous and powerful in her invisibility. She has the final comment when she is left alone on stage, crying for humanity. It was through the Pulse process that I found a way to distill the intentions of the Film text with only eight actors. All actors were engaged with what was organically emerging on the floor, all were available to enter the space, and all were proactively searching for their way to make offers through this omnipresence.
Consequently, they provided the solutions. The actor playing the Cleaner had embedded cleanliness as a source and consistently entered the space to create such imagery. I did not dramaturgically construct the Cleaner’s character journey beforehand but I did directorially seize upon the actor’s offers when the Pulse threw up the options.

In the beginning of the Film text, the filmmaker sets up the idea of surveillance firstly through the subliminal activities of the Cleaner and then by showing us the Closed Circuit Television footage of the lover’s clandestine meeting in the Embassy stairwell. Synchronistically, the ensemble nature of Pulse means that surveillance is not actually a conceptual idea but is in fact a working style. As well as this, the actors’ awareness of the theme of surveillance influenced their offers during the process and I made directorial choices to reinforce this notion. In the Performance text, we are aware of characters and ensemble actors witnessing everything that happens in the space even in intense private moments. The audience is watching the action being watched and the actors who are watching are aware of being watched themselves.

**Creating Transitions: Layering and Juxtaposition**

With the medium of film, ‘jump dissolves’ and ‘jump cuts’* take the viewer instantly from one location and time to another. In the Film text equivalent of *Women in Water* (Chap. 13), the camera takes us from the Embassy kitchen to She picking up the Goddaughter outside her school gates. They greet each other intimately, drive and talk, arrive at a public swimming pool, change in the changing room, then lie beside the pool. In the Performance text, transitions were often solved through the overlapping of sequences. While the Kitchen workers take off their aprons from the previous scene and watch dispassionately from upstage, the Goddaughter and She, oblivious to their presence, meet on the table downstage. They hug, take off their dresses and vulnerably examine their bodies in the imaginary mirror of the audience. The themes of scrutiny, voyeurism and privacy are represented on stage in this one multi-layered moment.

* "Jump Cut (n.) Cut which breaks continuity of time by jumping forward from one part of an action to another obviously separated from the first by an interval of time.”*68
The lovers lie ‘in bed’ at the end of *Desire by Numbers* (Chap. 11), as the table with a waiter dancing on it is pushed on stage to rest on top of them for *Heat in the Kitchen* (Chap. 12). Similarly, from *Past Revelations* (Chap. 14) into *Running to Survive* (Chap. 15), the lovers embrace while the Best friend jogs past, speaking to She. The previous scene and the beginning of the present scene co-exist in an ironic juxtaposition. In other overlapping transitions, it is a character’s emotional state that is juxtaposed with the next scene: for example, She at the end of *Bubble Bursts* (Chap. 20), Husband and She at the end of *Disconnection* (Chap. 22), and He at the end of *Car Park Clash* (Chap. 25).

Film can articulate infinite possibilities of literal space through a collage of locations, whereas in theatre, the performance space is finite. What happens in it, however, has the power to stimulate imaginal space, which ultimately is limitless. The viewer travels on a journey of a different kind. They must travel inside their own heart and mind to connect to meaning as they witness realities of different times and locations existing simultaneously in the one space. This dominant feature of Pulse, and not all theatrical endeavour, offers the audience a multi-faceted, complex, layered notion of reality. It challenges perceptions of exclusivity and introduces the idea of integrated experience. It proposes the idea that all experiences are inter-connected and that they directly act upon each other.

**Transforming Filmic Montage**

How do we stage a close-up? An establishing shot? A montage? In applying compositional principles from other disciplines to the theatre, we push the envelope of theatrical possibility and challenge ourselves to create new forms.  

Tina Landau

In the Film text, Potter has used the technique of montage* to deliver much of the visual narrative and rhythmic circumstances of the timeframe in which the story takes place. Material emerging from Pulse met the challenge to functionally facilitate the passing of time. In *Dead Dreams* (Chap. 10), the lovers sleep while morgue workers

“Montage (n.) Combination in a film of both the picture and sound elements regarded fundamentally as a creative art process; (in USA) an impressionistic assembly of short shots designed to bridge a lapse of time in a film narrative by briefly indicating the passage of events within it.”
with plastic gloves, drag their lifeless bodies across the space to re-arrange them. It could be a memory (He and She are linked by death in their pasts), a shared dream or a premonition. Real time and imaginary time, share the space as the recurring imagery of death, dirt and sanitation merge. The imagery for this sequence came from an Immersion Pulse, when a pile of latex gloves, as a generative element, was thrown into the space. It was much later, however, during the Rendering phase that I drew on this imagery to develop the sequence for this purpose.

The filmmaker used montage to indicate a change in circumstances and location as well as time. In the Film text (screenplay p.34), the viewer is taken from the house; where the Husband and Goddaughter are in intimate conversation, as the Cleaner observes, to the apartment of He, as he dances on a table with She laughing from the bed, to a retail shoe shop in the city, where the Goddaughter is trying on shoes. This filmic montage is replaced in the Performance text by Catwalk (Chap.18). The creation of this sequence came about when the music of a contemporary retail environment was dropped into the Pulse as a generative element, and as a grid pattern began to emerge, the actors drew on Principles to inhabit the evolving fantasy.

I did not initiate the Pulse in order to replace the montage. It was not until Rendering, that I thought of using this imagery to solve the transition dilemma. In Catwalk, all the actors assume one of their characters and walk the length of a fashion catwalk. Metaphorically speaking, in the ‘catwalk of life’ these characters are exhibiting their internal response to their current reality. He is doing push-ups, working hard under the table, while the Husband politician stands on top of him, tapping distractedly on his laptop. She cannot take the ‘role-play’ seriously and breaks into laughter, the Goddaughter who wants to be famous tries too hard and the Best Friend is self-conscious and frustrated. Meanwhile, the Kitchen workers deliver macho gestures: their singlets are draped over their shoulders in a male model pose until they mockingly flagellate themselves, an image suggestive of religious fanaticism.

Such a collage of images familiar to contemporary theatre, and Pulse in particular, plays with the “eclecticism of postmodernism: where the present moment includes all associations extending in time and space without bounds, without any preconception of what things belong together or one thing being sub-ordinate to another.” 71
In the last five to ten minutes of the Film text (screenplay pp.68-70), there is no scripted language. The visual narrative takes us through a montage of images, following She in Havana and He in Beirut. They are seen in fourteen different locations in a linear time progression over a week. In the Performance text, this montage became one sequence titled *Cuba and Beirut* (Chap. 30). To make this sequence, I began by feeding into the Pulse the suggestion of several events and turning points, from the film montage: He meets an old friend who offers him a position in his impoverished clinic, He attends a baptism and a wedding, while She takes video footage of the exuberance and the poverty of Havana, runs on the beach and dances at a disco. The literal nature of those specific scenes, delivered through verbal information, however, meant the actors became illustrative. The offers that emerged were not useable.

Ultimately, the key to unlocking the essence of this sequence was music. By feeding music into the Pulse as the generative source, the actors were informed atmospherically so they responded associatively (see V.R.B – Chap. 1/D). The Rendering of this sequence actually took place within a Pulse. To consolidate previously found material, I had asked the actors to Pulse a ‘kinetic map’. Having absorbed the process for three weeks and accumulated embedded images; they showed how deeply they were inside the momentum of telling the kinetic story. When it came to the *Cuba and Beirut* sequence, the actors simply moved from moment to moment, which served to synthesize the sub-textual, emotional states of the characters (see V.R.B – Chap. 1/ B).

*The importance of Cuba and Beirut is how He and She feel. He alienated and displaced, She is released and renewed. That is all we need to know to progress the story. In the Film text the details of the events taking place are catalysts for the emotional shifts. In this theatrical abstract space the viewer does not need to witness an emotional logic.* Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 15
**Dramaturgy in Action:**

**Re-shaping and Eliminating Scenes**

_The film scenes are very short and concise and don’t structurally translate well. There are too many transitions. We will have to fold scenes into one another or the rhythm will be too choppy and abrupt. All the theatrical transitions necessary would take up too much stage time and rehearsal time to build. The development of story, the evolving of relationships and our attachment to and involvement in the characters needs more consistent stage focus._ Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 17

The changing of the order of spoken scenes and the elimination of various visual narrative scenes was not decided before applying Pulse. I chose not to dramaturgically re-construct the text before rehearsals began but to solve, through the process, what I already knew would structurally impede a theatrical rhythm. In the Performance text, the sequences _Restaurant Eroticism, Husband’s Confession, Catwalk_ and _Secret Feelings_ (Chaps. 16 –19), appear in an unbroken linear progression. In the Film text (screenplay pp.29-35), the same storytelling section consists of seven crosscut scenes. The Husband, confessing his loneliness to the Goddaughter, is juxtaposed with several erotic and ecstatic images of He and She in several different locations. The Performance text achieves a similar effect with the overlap of _Restaurant Eroticism_ and _Husband’s Confession_, where the almost naked lovers remain under the table as the Husband begins his confession, and when the _Catwalk_ segues into _Secret Feelings_.

The Film text uses the narrative construction device of parallel development extensively. This involves progressing the narrative in fragments, by placing scenes with language alongside those without. In the Performance text, seemingly disconnected contextual visual information, is layered and integrated into the spoken sequences and presented simultaneously. An example of this, is the appearance

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*“Cross-cut (v.) to intermingle the shots of two or more scenes in the course of editing so that fragments of each scene will be presented to the spectator’s attention alternatively”* 72

*“Parallel Development (n.) the development of two pieces of action are represented simultaneously by showing first a fragment of one, and then a fragment of the other.”* 73
of Father Christmas and the Nun in *Incensed Elegy* (Chap. 26), further discussed in *Transforming Static Film Presentation into Physical Metaphor*. There are sequences with no language, but these do not parallel those in the Film text. Sequences such as, *Missing Each Other, Dead Dreams* and *Catwalk* were found through thematic investigation and only evolved into construction devices during the Rendering phase. The crosscut visual narrative construction towards the end of the film text (screenplay pp.68-70), as discussed in *Transforming Filmic Montage*, involves fourteen locations. In the Performance text, this section is represented by only two sequences, *Child’s Despair* and *Cuba and Beirut* (Chaps. 29, 30). The atmosphere, mood and emotional subtext of this Film text section became distilled through Pulse.

**The Pulse Approach to Design**

Theatre must recognize its own limitations. If it cannot be richer than the cinema, then let it be poor. If it cannot be as lavish as television, let it be ascetic. If it cannot be a technical attraction, let it renounce all outward technique.

Jerzy Grotowski

Before embarking on the rehearsal floor, I had engaged a sound designer to begin sourcing sound offers and had conceptualized certain design elements such as audio-visual material and microphones to play with layering the verbal landscape. As the Pulse process proceeded, however, it became clear that these externally imposed ideas could not be incorporated into the organic evolution of the Performance text. The final sound design is a collage that emerged from interaction, with the evolving verbal, physical and spatial scripts. *If there is to be an outside sound designer they must be in the space at every rehearsal. The actors are designing sound as we go because it is essential to the Pulse. Whatever design concept I had in discussion with the designer is no longer feasible. What is in the room is used. What is not is not. It’s about integration at source.* Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 9

As I discovered, constructing a sound layer early in the process and applying it at a later stage, cannot work for several reasons. Music and sound effects are important generative sources accompanying the building of every sequence, so the sources tried and found become wedded to the verbal and physical tracks. This evolving soundscape is an intricate element in the texture of the moment, and the running of
material in rehearsal cannot happen without it. The soundscape is continuous, so silence as a significant compositional tool can only be found through investigation on the floor. Often solutions to compositional challenges in the Rendering phase are found through a combination of collaborative offers involving sound, light and actors.

The integration of all elements during the rehearsal process is one factor that distinguishes Pulse from Bogart’s production approach. Bogart makes the physical, the verbal and the sound tracks separately, assembling the final composition in the last stage. In Pulse, the ensemble searches for the integration of the physical map, the text and the soundscape from the beginning of the process. There are times when tracks are separated and ‘re-composed’, but only after they have been initially developed. The intricate layering of all performance elements to such a level of integration, achieved in a relatively short timeframe, with sound, light and performance contributions simultaneously offered, would not be possible if tracks were laid down separately and then composed. This makes Pulse a labour intensive, yet time efficient compositional tool.

The Pulse performer and director is a bricoleur or an artist of limits. The ‘limitation of means’ forces the imagination to use only what is available. In the YES rehearsal process, objects were only introduced into the empty space as needed. In this way, we used only what seemed essential to tell the story theatrically. An initial props list (which in a traditional process would have been sought and brought into the space by a stage manager), was whittled down to almost nothing as the actors intuitively worked for a way of suggesting rather than describing activities. The introduction of the one major ‘set’ piece, the table, happened early in the Mapping phase. In the fourth sequence of the Performance text, it was introduced to facilitate the idea of a formal dinner, and in the fourteenth sequence the hospital trolley appeared. Apart from the cyclorama and the calico drops, these were the only objects in the space during the process. In reducing the actors’ options in the space, a surprising ingenuity comes into play and, by the time we came to Rendering, all four objects were integrated and had become essential narrative elements (see V.R.B – Chap. 2/A).

Transmutation through creative vision is the actual, day-to-day realization of alchemy. In bricolage, we take the ordinary materials in our hands and turn them into new living matter. 75

Stephen Nachmanovich
SECTION FOUR

Pulse and its Impact on Film Expression

Breaking the Bonds of Psychological Behaviourism

If (the actor’s) body restricts itself to demonstrating what is something that any average person can do - then it is not an obedient instrument capable of performing a spiritual act.  76

Jerzy Grotowski

Non-illustrative, improvisatory techniques, as Peter Brook found, “dislodge actors from reductive psychological behaviourism.”77 The challenge is always to funnel these rehearsal discoveries into the final outcome. Chaikin wanted to generate a new language for performance that “would not be one confined to models of social behaviour appropriate to given naturalistic texts.”78 Although in form YES, the Film text, is non-naturalistic, the characters still physically behave according to the rules of their social context. By applying a physical approach to the screenplay of this film, metaphorical physical imagery emerged which then informed the staging of the Performance text. Consequently, the character’s physical behaviour is not appropriate to their historical context, milieu or status and relationships. What is more important to me than seeing these characters as social constructs exhibiting masking behaviour, is that the audience experiences what fundamentally drives them, through seeing them kinetically engaged.

All the non-verbal information that is given in the Film text through landscape, the juxtaposition of a character’s emotional state with their circumstantial context, costume changes and close-ups on facial expression, is communicated in Pulse through the expressiveness of the body and the blending of dream, memory and reality. Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day15

In order to achieve the layering of different physical landscapes, the Pulse actor at times plays in two styles simultaneously. Lampe describes how Bogart similarly “challenges actors to create a physical score that exists independently from the verbal expression of their characters.”79 One example from YES is when the Husband, during The Ache of Emptiness (Chap. 23), lies contorted on the table his head turned
upside down, but speaks to his wife in a tense but conversational tone. Mary Overlie the post-modern dancer and major influence on Bogart’s work, describes this as “dissonances allowing for co-existence without the expected alliances.” \(^{80}\) “Through this ‘technique of dissociation’, Bogart disrupts Western representational conventions, which support a cultural status quo.” \(^{81}\) Pulse creates a similar ‘dissociation’ when it denies an expected congruence between verbal text and physical enactment of text as mentioned above.

**The ‘Actor’ and the ‘Performer’ Co-exist**

In Performance Pulse, the performer represents an archetype: a man chases a woman; a woman grieves over a body, a man and a woman dance. Pulse as a social tool comments on the nature of being human, as frequently what emerges from the given physical parameters are the epic themes of love, loss, jealousy and death. These themes are also my pre-occupations as an artist, and as such, is the reason for the choice of this Film text. In Performance Pulse, when they are verbal storytelling, individuality or their own ‘persona’ emerges, but they are always working from ‘self’. An actor, however, is one who is transformed by a generative source (such as text) into another: a character. The Pulse rehearsal process brings both performer and actor together, as the performer meets the actor when Pulse interrogates a narrative text. The ‘self’ or the performer/composer and the ‘transformed self’ (character) are cohabitating.” The extremity of each state is compromised in favour of the extra-dimensions possible with the coalescence of the double.

In each layer of the process, the performer/actor moves continuously and fluidly between perception and reception. “Inner/outer, subject/object and structure/freedom are in dynamic coexistence.” \(^{82}\) They internalize the audience, in order to experience themselves as part of the image they are making, as well as literally taking themselves

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*Similar to Overlie, I seek the performer for Pulse who has ‘presence’ yet can work without presenting ‘personality’. The distinction between these two states of working from ‘self’ in performance, ‘presence’ and personality, is a matter of technique. Says Overlie, “Two things need to be concurrent: deeply involved concentration and physical activity.” \(^{83}\)*

*It is consequent to note that the protagonists of the Film text are named He and She in the screenplay, although we never hear them referred to by name. One only finds this out when reading the credits. In this way, Potter declares her intentions of using them as allegorical symbols. In discussing the Performance text, I have continued the archetypal distillation in referencing all the characters: the Husband, the Best Friend, the Goddaughter, the Aunt and the Cleaner. This naming indicates their role as well as their relationship to She.*
through a physical journey. It is the intensity of this physical effort and the consequent emotional impact on their instrument that assists the illusion of transformation. The viewer witnesses the process of transformation as it is occurring.

The Evolution of the Actor’s Emotional Map

During the Mapping phase, the actor’s task is to physically respond to the language and consequently experience it viscerally. The actor must work in a state of what Chaikin refers to as “conscious ignorance.” The dialogue between the body and mind is paradoxical; the body responds freely to poetic or abstract possibilities inspired by the prescribed text they are speaking. As with Chaikin’s sound-and-movement work, the actions are being “generated by kinetic response rather than emotional impulse.” This approach works as a feedback loop for the actor’s internal emotional journey. They respond with gesture and action to the content of the language, searching for what the language makes them do, not feel, based on associative impulse. While their response “does not come out of emotional experience, it does lead into it. The action in short, engages the emotion rather than the other way around.” The action itself will inevitably create sensation or feelings and consequently they discover their emotional journey after they have found the external form. They work from the ‘outside-in’.

Externalizing the ‘Inner Voice’

In the screenplay, Potter states, “whenever dialogue appears in italics it indicates the character’s ‘inner voice’ or thoughts. We hear the words but do not see them spoken.” This film device creates an intimacy with the viewer: a verbal equivalent to the close-up. Pulse as a process externalizes the character’s ‘inner world’ and as such, this ‘inner voice’ becomes a communicative voice, changing the viewer’s relationship to the protagonist. For example in Past Revelations (Chap. 4), a lengthy monologue revealing a painful past is shared with He and has the effect of reconciling their differences and deepening their intimacy. In the Film text, She withholds these thoughts from her lover but shares her revelation with the viewer, privileging their participation in the narrative and making them her confidant.
The four-page voice over monologue of the Aunt, as she is dying, needed to be sustained theatrically without the aid of close-ups. During the Mapping phase of *Incensed Elegy* (Chap. 26), the Aunt, as her younger self, became an imaginary figure alive in the space delivering the text to She. This expressionistic approach allowed the audience to directly witness and experience their intimacy.

**Transforming Static Film Presentation into Physical Metaphor**

The process of Pulse tends towards the expressionistic, rather than that of subtle impressions, which film aims to capture. The replacement of subtlety, with heightened expression, constantly draws the viewer’s attention to the reality of the live experience, and the transparency of the character’s inner life means an audience experiences dimensions of a character that are rarely seen on film. In the Film text (screenplay p.14), the lovers are spooning in bed and whispering their thoughts to each other. It was during an Immersion Pulse of this section (see V.R.B – Chap.1/A), where the text was fed into the Pulse as a generative source, that the kinetic framework for the text was created. The use of the space was expansive, the actors were in a continuous flow and the driving energy behind the words was playful and exuberant. When this sequence was Rendered, I chose to leave the physical script generated from this first layer of process intact (*Desire by Numbers*, Chap. 11). It was also important, however, to the narrative of the developing relationship, to suggest the quiet intimacy that the Film text creates. I attempted this by having the actors commence and finish the sequence in the same intimate physical position, speaking the same text; “She: Speak to me. He: Of what? What is there to say?” I wanted to imply that the musing over the nature of love may not have been discussed at all and that their ‘dance’ of love may only have been an imagined projection of their desire.

*In close-up, the camera shows us every subtle shift of thought through the flicker of an eye or the clench of a jaw as we project onto the characters what we think they must be ‘feeling’. With Pulse they put their bodies through the trauma in front of us. We cannot experience their pain but we can witness their experience of it. The film allows the audience to imagine the events as one would in reading a novel, whereas the Performance text asks the viewer to be viscerally involved.*

Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 15
In the Film text (screenplay p.24), He and She are in his apartment, having just made love. He is preparing food, as he tells her why he left Beirut and She, sitting on the bed, remembers her childhood in Belfast. We hear her words but do not see them spoken. In the Performance text, both characters re-enact fragments of their histories. During the Mapping Pulse, the speaking actors were searching for a way to physically experience the thoughts in the text, while the rest of the ensemble were there to support the imaginative responses (V.R.B – Chap. 2/B). As a result, physical imagery suggestive of the past events emerged, and during the Rendering process I chose to juxtapose this with each character’s present reality (Past Revelations, Chap.14).

As already mentioned, when working on the scene involving the thoughts of the dying Aunt (Incensed Elegy, Chap. 26), we were searching for its theatrical interpretation. In rehearsal, we did an Immersion Pulse with only the actor playing She in the space. The actor playing the Aunt fed in the text, enabling the actor playing She to physically respond to the language, and consequently find her emotional journey through the monologue (see V.R.B – Chap. 1/B). The next layer was a Mapping Pulse, where the actor playing the Aunt found her physical relationship to the space, to the hospital trolley and to She. During the Rendering session of this sequence, we layered these two realities. The third layer, the subliminal image of Father Christmas and the Nun at the moment of the Aunt’s death, was a compression of thematic references found in several visual scenes in the Film text (screenplay p.48). He, wandering the streets at night, finds himself in a church observing an illuminated nativity scene complete with an Arabic dark-skinned wise man, and in the Catholic hospital ward Father Christmas arrives to hand out presents as a Priest is stopped from giving the last rites to the atheist Aunt. In the Performance text, the ambiguous image of these symbolic figures holding hands implies several of the Film text’s ongoing themes; the yearning for the marriage of seemingly incompatible belief systems, the potential for the ancient and the contemporary to co-exist, and the irony of historical perspective.

The Delicate Balance of Words and Action

I wasn’t sure how much music the film could sustain in addition to the music of the voices. It took some work in the cutting room to find out what the necessary balance was. In the end I felt it could sustain more than I had predicted. 88

Sally Potter
Here, Potter describes her experience with the layering of two sound languages. In the Rendering phase, I was playing with the integration of three tracks, physical, verbal and sound. Potter’s discovery about the second aural layer was similar to mine in relation to the density that was possible with physical layering. I was surprised for example that *Seduction* (Chap. 9), *Desire by Numbers* (Chap. 11), *Restaurant Eroticism* (Chap. 16) and *The Ache of Emptiness* (Chap. 23), could sustain such continual action. The non-fragmented dialogic structure of these verses encouraged a continual flow of dense physical imagery that supported and served the meaning of the verbal text. A viewing of V.R.B – Chap.1/A, reveals that in *Seduction* and *Desire by Numbers* little changed from the first layer of process to the last. In order to integrate and balance the physical and verbal track of other sequences, however, Rendering involved extensive investigation. The physical map of each sequence had to find ‘dialogue’ with the words. Through Pulse, the physical landscape had not become more important than the text, the viewer still had to hear and comprehend the verbal narrative, but the physical life of the theatrical world was no longer just an underscoring of the verbal meaning. It now had equal weight of expression in the space.

When it came to sequences such as *Beginning of Life* (Chap. 6) and *Car Park Clash* (Chap. 25), I found that the complexity of the thought progression in the verse militated against dense layering with physical image. The viewer needed to be able to follow the philosophical argument without distraction. Only a few strong physical interactions from the Mapping of *Car Park Clash*, were used in the final sequence. Rendering involved the plotting of those moments and bridging them with motivated ‘everyday’ movement (see V.R.B – Chap.2/C). The need for She not to move, while speaking in *Beginning of Life* and *Prayer* (Chap. 31), was juxtaposed by the ensembles dynamic use of the set elements in the space.

*It is possible to think of the physical script of YES in the same way as we think of different types of dramatic text. For example Heightened Verse (Movement): intelligible, but not the way people speak/move, Contemporary Speech (Movement): sounds/looks like everyday speech/movement, but is highly structured and Everyday Speech (Movement) which uses formulaic idioms and clichés. The viewer’s awareness of the verse structure in YES is heightened when they hear the rhyming couplets, but at other times they are not aware of the speech devices at all. The physical map of YES is experienced in a similar way.*
Intimacy and Violence:
Heightened Physical and Emotional States

In the Film text, when He and She decide to meet, they end up in his apartment. The quality of their lovemaking is tentative, sensual, intimate, subtle and in close-up. Pulse significantly changed the tone of this physical interaction, giving the seduction a heightened intensity. During an Immersion Pulse, the actor playing He juxtaposed the sentimentality of the lover’s words with an ambiguously aggressive physical and verbal tone (see V.R.B – Chap. 1/A). Was it rape or erotic play? When it came to the Rendering of this sequence I wanted to keep the raw intensity of their first physical engagement.* In the narrative’s plot, she had only met him once before. He was a stranger and a foreigner. As viewers, we observe the nature of the physical interaction from her point of view and see the doubt and uncertainty in her expression (Seduction, Chap. 9). His menacing, teasing tone has the potential to suggest the darker issues behind gender and cross-cultural politics, ignorance of ‘the other’ breeds fear, erotic danger and the connection between sex and violence, the projection of one’s lover as torturer, and the kidnap of a Westerner by an Eastern terrorist. The viewer does not know whether the threat is real or imagined until She returns to the sensuality and truth of the present, and, with her final line, “We are not so different you and I”, pushes him onto his back and straddles him. She has conquered He and/or her fear.

Just as the tone and pitch of their first lovemaking intensified through Pulse, it was inevitable that the actors would explore the sexual heat of the emotional subtext (Restaurant Eroticism, Chap. 16), in the erotic but relatively discreet Film text restaurant scene (screenplay pp. 29 – 31). I found the actors physical investment in the imagery that emerged to be courageous and dangerous, consequently, I chose to keep this version in tact when it was Rendered.

*My aesthetic and personal politics inform my choices as an artist/director. It is in the Rendering phase that the choices of the director come into play. I chose to keep the raw, heightened physicality of this investigation; where as other directors may not have made that choice. I would not have had such choices, however, if it hadn’t been for the type of offers that the Pulse process allows the actors to create.
It all happened so quickly. Immediately She was down to her underwear. She initiated this and then took his pants off. There seemed to be no inhibitions... soft porn imagery in the context of rehearsal art. Afterwards the actors spoke of the protective bubble or trance tool that the theatrical elements of floor light and sound had created.

Director’s Rehearsal Journal: Day 9 (see V.R.B – Chap.2/A).

At the end of Women in Water (Chap. 13), the Goddaughter sobs inconsolably and in Child’s Despair (Chap. 23), instead of silently crying, she has slit her wrists and wails, longing for her mother. The episode with the knife in Holy War (Chap. 21), becomes a physically menacing collision. In the Film text, the brandishing of the knife is the climax of a ‘war of words’. In the Performance text, Whizzer physically assaults He early on in the sequence, and the physical contact escalates until they are topless and Whizzer is perched upon his chest strangling him.

Pulse creates a form of lyrical expressionism where as Film tends to be emotionally suggestive and impressionistic. The Film text uses cinematic close-up and art and sound design to create intensity. The film actor often expresses the character’s internal emotional state by masking it and we, the viewers, project onto them what we imagine they feel. To deliver the emotional intensity of a close-up in the Pulse space, the actor uses his/her entire body to suggest the state. This physical exertion takes the actor himself or herself into a state of visceral experience. The actor/performer works in, as Barba calls it, a ‘pre-expressive state’, where the extremity of the physical effort “heightens the audience’s awareness of their presence.” Grotowski believed that the actor was to “show himself as he is in the extreme situation of the action he is playing, in order to reveal the essential human truth.” In the Performance text, the externalizing of the character’s emotional state using the body as the vehicle of expression, together with the absence of the geo-political visual context of the Film text, significantly influence the impact of the narrative on the audience.

*This means that the overall outcome of the Pulse process is of a heightened physical nature. It does not mean, however, that there are not moments of emotional introspection and subtle physical gesture that are more suggestive than expressive. The physical, visual imagery created during the Mapping phase gives the director an abundance of choices in the Rendering phase. When the extremity of the physical language is at risk of creating plateau, or predictability, or overwhelming the meaning of the verbal content, it is a Pulse Principle to pull the physical/emotional landscape back to a subterranean level. It is at the discretion of the director to make choices that are more suggestive and implicit.
**Congruence of Content and Form**

We talked about the themes and we tried to create a look that reflected them. I wanted to find ways of somehow making the camera speak in verse….the effect of shooting at different camera speeds, to find a visual equivalent of the rhythm of the verse in movement; a kind of camera music. 

Sally Potter

Despite experimentation with different camera techniques, the realistic context of the Film text is never transcended. However, it is actually the incongruence of the verse juxtaposed with the geo-political visual imagery that lifts the story of the film into an allegory. If their relationship were to be played out in a domestic environment, the Film text would be a story of cross-cultural love. It is because of its realistic context, that the lovers’ affair becomes a symbol of the current global conflict. The verse form represents the personal and the visual language of the film: the political.

The Pulse process, on the other hand, evolved a physical script that ‘spoke in verse’. The Performance text has a lyrical congruence. It is both aurally and visually poetic and the abstract nature of the verse is reflected in the use of the abstract theatrical space. The political allegory experienced in the Performance text is less pronounced than that of the Film text, as the content of the verse does not have the visual context to reinforce the political themes. The impact of this will be discussed in the following section.
SECTION FIVE

Pulse and the Position of the Viewer

A Shift in the Emphasis of Content

We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs and who really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyze himself.  

Jerzy Grotowski

An empty space ignites the viewer’s imagination, as it is an abstract place for an imaginary world. It does not confront us, as the Film text does, with the world we know, graffiti and barbed wire in Belfast or bombed out Beirut. It is an ‘empty canvas’ pregnant with possibility. The only thing that is tangible, undeniable and absolute is the live human portrayed in front of us. It is their sweat, tears and genuine physical exertion that we experience. In his theatre blog, reviewer Matthew Clayfield, compares the experience of viewing the Performance text with that of the Film text. He mentions that the “clash of civilizations had been imbued with a newfound sense of timelessness” and that “without the film's overriding political allegory, what the play was left with was its undercurrents of desire.” He contended that the “human form had become the sole focal point” and that perhaps this “physical sense of lived experience is what it means to be theatrical.”

During the run of the show, I realized that the Pulse version of this narrative had become a personal story of desire, loss and reconciliation. It was more a physical and emotional journey through time and space than a collision of intellectual perspectives. As such, the climax as experienced in the Film text narrative, had shifted from the collision of ideas and ideology in Car Park Clash, to the outpouring of grief in Incensed Elegy. The identification that viewers had with the death of a loved one seemed to have more impact than the climactic turning point of the lovers’ fight and the resultant criticism of the West.

The filmmaker says she wanted to end the story on a ‘note of hope’. “We think better, more creatively, and act more decisively from a perspective of hope than one of
despair," hence the final montage of the Film text involves He and She both dressed in white playfully laughing and kissing on a beach in Cuba. In the final moments of the Performance text, He and She are united once more, but the audience cannot know whether this is a real or imagined event. As they lie on the table in a loving embrace, the Cleaner climbs underneath them and creates an emotional juxtaposition, crying as the light fades on her. This ambiguity encourages the viewer to see life as a paradox and suggests that happy endings are a matter of perception. Although it was my directorial choice to leave the Cleaner in the final moments crying for humanity, it is up to the viewer to choose the ending for him or herself. This final moment is perhaps one of the clearest examples of my personal pre-dispositions filtering through the Pulse aesthetic.

The Presence of a Live Audience:

Awareness and Integration

The importance of physical virtuosity is becoming stronger each day in today’s theatre and we are beginning to realize that through his mastery the actor may serve as an example and celebration of physical and spiritual excellence for our culture, as he has done for centuries in the Asian theatre. 

Robert Benedetti

In her book *Actors and Onlookers*, Natalie Crohn Schmitt examines the influence of improvisational theories upon contemporary performance. In using improvisation games as performance making tools, Viola Spolin found that “tasks emphasize the immediacy of physical response, obliterating the distinction behind mind and body and thus facilitating the intuitive response.” Crohn Schmitt explains that when the “idea of acting as game-playing is applied to text”, the text becomes a prop and the actors “experience the material rather than serve the author’s intentions in representing the text.” The play then is not “so much represented but played with, like an object in a theatre game.” This describes the Pulse approach to working with text during the rehearsal process of YES.

*Metaphorical imagery continually sabotages the linear narrative and subverts moments of representation. Memory is felt deeply and the actor's/character's body commits to this pain. I am witnessing this experience but am always aware of the theatrical context and the actor's tools.* Director’s Rehearsal Journal: last week
Crohn Schmitt makes the point, that when work is made through improvisation, whether it is with new materials or scripted text, “the act of creating or perceiving thus becomes central to what is created or perceived.” The audience, she maintains, regards the work as “process rather than product, as a performance rather than a play.” There is a sense that the work is unfolding in the present because “reality is not elsewhere in an idea but here and now,” and that the “dramatic interest is not in the plot’s unraveling but in the moment-to-moment occurrences.” Barba remarks that at the pre-expressive level of performance, when there is no mind commanding the body, “there is no realism/non-realism polarity, there are only natural and unnatural actions… neither does the identification/alienation polarity exist.” Just as the performer/actor operates on several levels of consciousness during the execution of the Performance text, a viewer can paradoxically be emotionally engaged and moved by a moment without becoming absorbed in the fictitious events. The viewer does not need to be lost in a narrative to identify emotionally.

In the Performance text of YES, the ensemble of actor/performers do not obscure their playing of different functions, and the overt manipulation of theatrical form means that the audience is always aware of the performance event. They are conscious of how it is made. A contributing factor to this audience awareness is the style of playing out front, which grew out of Performance Pulse where performers play with each other not to each other, and has continued to influence the staging style of this narrative. “Because of the frontal way of acting, the audience is constantly made aware of the fact that they are in a theatre. The proscenium is highlighted, not abandoned. Yet the stage - through the very same device - is never allowed to close itself off and become a self-contained fictional space.”

In viewing the Performance text, the open stage of the empty space offers the viewer simultaneous focus points. This makes the viewer inherently involved in the process of composition. Without simultaneity, posits Barba “one limits the possibility of

*Gerald Siegmund observed the affect of playing out front in discussing Stefan Pucher’s ‘Cherry Orchard’.
making complex meanings arise out of performance.” \textsuperscript{109} Due to the simultaneity of the Performance text, each viewer may have an alternative reading, not so much of the stage action itself, but of the metaphorical meanings it is possible to extract. The Performance text can be read in a linear way, or the viewer can grapple with the ambiguity and go deeper. Interpretation is subjective and personal.

As Barba points out,

For a spectator, the more difficult it becomes for him to interpret or to judge immediately the meaning of what is happening in front of his eyes and in his head, the stronger is his sensation of living through an experience… the stronger is the experience of the experience.\textsuperscript{110}

The non-literal artifice of the world in which the narrative operates demands the spectator’s imaginative interaction, but its familiar and recognizable form anchors the spectator’s desire for linear meaning. The literal nature of the narrative also militates against the danger of obscurity, always a possibility when working with multilayered meanings. Pulse presents itself as a process able to bridge the presentation of a concrete linear narrative or traditional form and the non-literal stage poetics explored by contemporary performance-makers.

The Pulse acting style liberates characters, actors and the audience from the notion of a fixed identity. Using fragmentation as a process tool, the actors respond to their constantly changing environment, and character evolves from a series of moments. The responsive nature of this interaction affects the entire landscape of the world created. It is one of “choice, change and chance.” \textsuperscript{111} Characterization in the medium of film “is an exploration of the limits of a person.” \textsuperscript{112} It is pursued as a self contained, finite idea and “sustains the stereotyping of people, the stereotyping of ourselves.” \textsuperscript{113} In the YES Performance text, the ensemble ‘applies’ the notion of role when they dress at the beginning of the piece and the actor playing He is ‘created’ by the Cleaner. A pale, blonde actor portrays a Middle Eastern man. There is no disguise and the “audience is part of the event and informed of the means of its making.” \textsuperscript{114} If the self does not have fixed boundaries and identity is fluid “character becomes a study of interactions” \textsuperscript{115} and as Chaikin says, “the actor recreates himself thus testifying to the possibility of human change.”\textsuperscript{116}
The Film text narrative is hierarchical in structure. It is driven by a plot making it linear in time, and by the two protagonists, which creates lead and minor characters. When the collaborative process of Pulse meets the Film text, this dominant paradigm is transformed and process is reflected in the final product. The interactive functions of the actor as server, observer and character are in a dynamic flow. The continual and constant presence of the ensemble in the space, makes it clear to an audience that the work emerged from a group process. In this way a visceral experience of collaboration is transmitted to an audience. Not only is the Film viewing experience isolating, but the Film text’s statement, about global politics flows through its form leading a viewer to experience existential angst. The audience of the Performance text is exposed to the dynamics of group culture. Solos shift into duets and the sense that the group may invade any moment is palpable. It reinforces how we operate as humans; we are interdependent and co-dependent. Pulse tells us that we can’t exist in space without operating in a cohesive state.

The filmmaker has an advantage, which the theatre director will acquire only if he leaves the realistic set and turns to the open stage. Then theatre, by being theatrical, comes to life again. This brings us back to our starting point: for there to be a difference between theatre and non-theatre, between everyday life and theatrical life, there needs to be compression of time that is inseparable from the intensification of energy. This is what creates a strong link with the spectator. 117

Peter Brook
NOTES


6. ibid.

7. ibid.


12. ibid.

13. ibid.

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21. Cairns. op cit., p. 27.

22. ibid.


24. ibid.

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26. ibid.


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53. ibid.

54. Marshall and Williams, op cit., p. 179.

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58. Landau, op cit., p. 29.
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100. ibid., p.116.

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PULSE
A Physical Approach to Staging Text

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE
DVD (submitted with thesis)
YES: Memory Grab. An edited version of the YES Performance Text
List of Sequences from the YES Performance text

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**APPENDIX ONE**

**DVD**

**YES Memory Grab**
An edited version of the YES Performance Text: the filming of the theatrical experience. The following is a list of Performance text Sequences with accompanied Chapter numbers. To activate Chapter headings turn subtitles on.

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<td>The Reunion</td>
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APPENDIX TWO

DVD
Video Rehearsal Blog: YES Performance Text
The following is the list of Chapters containing rehearsal fragments referred to in this thesis. Chapters can be accessed independently from the DVD menu.

Chapter One: Immersion Pulse

A Continuous text as source
  • Seduction and Desire by Numbers
  • Incensed Elegy

B Score as source
  • Fragments of Movement Pulse

C Theme as source
  • Missing Each Other and Husband and Cleaner Duet

D Sound as source
  • Cuba and Beirut

Chapter Two: Mapping Pulse

A Physical Units that transferred directly to Rendering
  • Ache of Emptiness
  • Restaurant Eroticism

B Metaphorical and Suggestive Imagery used as source for Rendering
  • Heat in the Kitchen
  • Past Revelations
  • Running to Survive
  • Bubble Bursts

C Rendering a fragment of Car Park Clash: Physical Retrieval

Chapter Three: Performance Preparation Pulse

A Preparation Pulse with Light and Sound as Source
  • Preparation Pulse in the performance space before the last performance of YES
APPENDIX THREE

Pulse Terminology: Key Terms and Concepts

Along with developing the process of Pulse training, I have had to create a language with which to describe it to those involved. Most of the terms used will be familiar to other performance contexts, and indeed are used in the application of other art forms particularly the visual arts and music. However, on the Pulse floor, it is the specific application of a term aligned with kinaesthetic experience that allows a performer to link their experience to their cognitive understanding. These terms are used as a short hand for side-coaching and later as directorial instructions. The performer learns to associate these terms with stage action and then embeds the ‘language’. This makes it possible to ‘converse’ with collaborators who can relate to these terms in a specific way in this specific context. This terminology grew organically, hastily and indiscriminately on the teaching floor, due to an urgent need to communicate in a distilled way. I have only included the terms, (in alphabetical order under each section), and sometimes an explanation of their application, that are necessary to articulate the nature of Pulse in the context of this thesis.

Performance Principles

Introduced first, the practice of these Principles is focused on the actions of the individual in relation to the group.

Climax - the peak development of an action or of the escalating energy of the group.

Contrast – a performer makes an offer in opposition to what is taking place. Contrast can be applied to: the body (movement/stillness), the voice (vocal sound/language/silence), tempo (fast/slow/still), volume (loud/soft/silence) and ensemble action (solo/cell/group). Once the idea of contrast in action or form is embedded, the more complex concept of juxtaposition with content can be integrated.
Development - an action increases or diminishes in terms of tempo, use of space, size or volume, but the action itself does not change.

Form and Chaos – choreographic form is created through the geometric patterns of group movement in the space. A pattern of movement may be established which will follow the **jo ha kyu** to execute a form. At the **climax** the group may **shatter the space** creating chaos in **contrast** to the previous sequence.

Geometry of Space – attention to movement in the space in its geometric form: straight lines (up and down, side to side), diagonals and circular motion.

Jo, Ha, Kyu - the organic rhythm of any sequence, from an individual **unit of action**, to the shape of a Pulse itself. Zeami (AD 1363 – 1443) responsible for the creation of Noh theatre coined this phrase. “In this structure, you start slowly, then gradually and smoothly accelerate towards a very fast peak. After the peak, there is usually a pause and then a recommencement of the acceleration cycle…Almost any rhythmic physical activity will tend to follow this pattern if left to itself” *

Repetition - The repeated use of an action or **unit of action** (physical and/or verbal). A fundamental tool used as a Performance and Compositional Principle, (e.g. to set up a pattern for others to join, as a **solo** to create **contrast** or as an individual or group **recurring motif**). Repeating any action must involve **development** to avoid the tendency to **plateau**.

Stillness and Silence – are employed as group ‘punctuation’. Dynamic tension is built using sustained stillness and silence.

Sustaining Action – the continuing or pursuing of action based on what the Pulse **needs**. Individuals must override the tendency to stop an action (e.g. running or falling) based on an entrenched individual or group rhythmic pattern that develops.

Synchrony – the recognition of connections and working for unison, rather than making an offer in **contrast**.
Compositional Principles

Introduced second, the practice of these Principles is focused on the collaborative building of the Pulse.

Architecture of the Space – the use of the characteristics of the playing space, the walls and floor, as generative elements for the Pulse, and how shape, dimensions, protrusions and gaps offer possibilities for action.

Cluster – a small group working together in unison. The group may work rhythmically or with gesture in support of, or in juxtaposition to, other actions in the space such as solos and duets.

Cohesion – refers to times when the whole room is working towards the same task, idea, theme or goal, but engaged in different activities.

Denouement – the ensemble consciousness towards the sense of duration has developed and the group recognises the Pulse must finish. Whilst maintaining the stage action they find a way to bring back the recurring motifs to bring the Pulse to closure.

Depth of Field – the three parallel bands of an end-on playing space, usually used simultaneously: foreground, middle ground and background. The ensemble is responsible for taking care of the ‘balance of the space’.

Development to Climax – practiced by the individual as a performance principle, it is now a group action. The ensemble is aware of an increase in tempo and/or volume involved in the actions on the floor and all participants find a way to contribute with intensity to the build. At the climax, in order not to plateau the space will shatter and the landscape will change.

Dislocator – physical or verbal rupture in the space. A complete dislocation or change in direction. A contradiction that disrupts expectations.
Duet – two performers working in parallel.

Juxtaposition – making an offer in relation to content rather than form, that creates opposition e.g. tragic/humourous, literal/abstract. Elements may be layered in sharp contrast to each other so that resulting meaning arises from the clash of disparate elements.

Layering – is created in the space when there are different ‘performance languages’ (song, speaking, action, sourced sound) operating simultaneously but performers are still working in cohesion.

Performatve Gestures – physical or vocal actions that when put together will constitute a repeatable unit of action. These may include turning the head to the audience (breaking the fourth wall), hugging, pulling and pushing, whispering and Languages Other Than English, (at this point implied meaning is still through image and sound, not language.)

Recurring Motifs – involves recognising and then ‘storing’ or memorising a sequence, which will return at intervals throughout the Pulse. A motif is group owned if different members of the ensemble apply repetition to the same sequence. If the group picks up a motif, it will most likely be the thematic source for that Pulse.

Signifiers of Emotion – involves applying the Principles to the sounds of crying and laughing and exploring their compositional possibilities musically as opposed to their connection to psychologically induced emotion. Commitment to action serves to create believability for the viewer.

Stream of Consciousness – during a verbal solo, when a performer’s ‘composer’ is activated they apply the Principles to whatever language emerges.

Solo – an individual performer may create physical or vocal action, speaking or singing which may be moving or static.
**Unit of Action** – a sequence of gestures, which when combined, is repeatable. The order of the actions within the unit may change but the content remains the same. The unit may become a **recurring motif** for a **solo** or a **duet** or become a group motif. A unit of action may become **layered** when **juxtaposed** with sound or language.

**Key Concepts**

**Introduced from the outset, the practice of these concepts is focused on the performer embedding a working style and a shared approach to structure.**

**Breaking the Fourth Wall** - performers build interaction with the audience through intention and focus. Most speaking is directed to the audience rather than another performer. Performers work in parallel with each other, but work to the audience relating to them as playing partners.

**Commitment to Action** – creates believable action, which is the essence of performative truth. A Pulse precept, is that action invented independent of impulse is untruthful performance. If an idea is imposed upon the Pulse that has not organically emerged (from impulse) through the development of the ‘narrative’ and the use of Principles, it will appear self-conscious and inauthentic.

**Shattering the Space** – when a pattern has come to a **plateau** and does not **climax**, the Pulse is stuck. A performer may then initiate action that is recognised by the group as an opportunity to ‘throw the cards in the air and see where they land’. Everyone drops their current action, goes into the ‘unknown’ and searches for the beginning of the next sequence.

**‘Smelling’ Dramatic Potential** – as content evolves from within the Pulse stimulated by internal (units of action, language) or external (light, sound, text) generative elements, there will be too many offers on the floor. The group tries to discriminate and ‘smell’ the offers with the most potential to explore strong, universal, themes. Once a theme is established the ensemble looks for its **juxtaposition**.
**Tendency to Plateau** – repetition can lead to the ‘ironing out’ or patterning of the action (physical or verbal), stopping its forward momentum. Involved in all repetition is a constant shifting of energy, **development** or re-arranging of elements and the re-composing of the score. ‘The same, but different’ is short hand for this concept.

**What Does it Need?** – This question is internalized from the first moment on the Pulse floor, and is the intention behind all Compositional Principles. As Michael Chekhov observes, “true freedom in improvising must always be based upon necessity; otherwise it will soon degenerate into either arbitrariness or indecision.”

In a Pulse the focus is always on making collaborative art, on the piece of art itself, and not on what the individual performer is doing or wanting to contribute. The Pulse is ‘greater than the sum of its parts.’ The Principles are there as sign posts to help the performer ‘compose’ appropriate action and not give way to their ego.

**Working in Parallel** – performers create their own ‘reality’ whilst working alongside others. The focus of the action is always out front, but their proximity and physical interaction mean that they are connected and they recognise that they are working in a **duet** or as a group.

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**Notes**


APPENDIX FOUR

The Different Functions of Pulse

In the different working languages, the term ‘improvisation’ or its equivalent is applied to very different procedures: from the fast elaboration of material for composition, to the possible variations of a same score; from a performer’s individual contribution, to the whole dramaturgy, or to the emergence of an unforeseen event; from the skill to surprise the spectator with sudden detours, to the ability to do the same with colleagues changing the rule of the established game. And most important of all: the intelligence to surprise oneself within a stable and repeated form.¹

Eugenio Barba

The following descriptions will help to further clarify the focus of this research, by tracking the evolution of this performance practice. As already mentioned in the description of the Pulse process, the result of training actors in improvisation, composition and ensemble practice has facilitated multiple outcomes.

Performance Improvisation

Having embedded Performance and Compositional Principles, integrated light, sound and objects, and created a Pulse from themes evolving on the floor, the Pulse ensemble begins to work with images, song lyrics and short texts offered as a generative source by the director before the commencement of a Pulse. By building the stamina of the group the time frame of a Pulse can be extended from short Pulse ‘poems’ of ten minutes duration, to an hour or more, with more complex sources being used.² The flexibility of the form means that it has been adapted to varying lengths in many locations.

Performance Making

The organic development of my improvisatory investigation led to using these discoveries in multiple contexts. Hulton describes how Chaikin’s work kept evolving at the Open Theatre: “he continued to develop ways in which improvisatory exercises could be used both as performance, and as a means of generating material for performance.”³

Similarly, I began to use the Pulse Compositional Principles to make Pulse sequences, which could be woven together in a modular construction. This was the beginning of retrieving Pulse material in order to repeat it.
Pulse as a Rehearsal Tool

Working with Pulse trained actors on a scripted text meant that there was already an understanding of a rehearsal culture as well as an established shared working language. Using the dramatic text as source, Pulse was used to facilitate the actors’ free investigation of the imaginary world of the narrative and characters, and to open the actor to possibilities of a physical life in the space outside the narrative of the text. Often group movement sequences that emerged during the Rehearsal Pulse were retrieved and found their way into the final staging of the piece.  

Creating Performance Text from Dramatic Narrative

During the process of several directed projects I started to distil the Pulse Rehearsal Principles whilst working with the narrative text. There was no time, however, to focus on the investigation of process and these were not texts or actors that I had chosen. It became clear to me that in order to develop my artistic practice, I would need to choose the parameters of the project, the type of script and the actors I wanted to work with. As a result of this, the YES Project was conceived.

Notes


2. On several occasions I have worked with a large ensemble (twenty-eight to thirty performers) using a novel as the generative text source. The text was used to generate ideas and improvised language. The text of the novel itself was not used. One example of this was, the hour long Pulse entitled *Visions of Paradise* made in 2000, using the novel “Veronica Decides to Die” by Paul Coelho as the source.

4. In an adaptation of Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* set in a Bosnian Refugee camp, called *Zivot* (2001), Grusha’s journey through the mountainous landscape was created by the bodies of the ensemble in the empty space, as well as several physically complex dream sequences, which appeared in an adaptation of *The House of Bernada Alba* called *Cassa d’Alba* (2002).

5. Some of these projects include: *Uncle Vanya* by Howard Barker, *New Anatomies* by Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Anna Karenina* adapted by Shared Experience Theatre Company and *Bright Room Called Day* by Tony Kushner
TH' WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

VCA DRAMA COMPANY 2007 PRESENTS

yes

The mystery is that each cell knows its destiny...

A MASTERS by RESEARCH PROJECT
from the film by SALLY POTTER

ADAPTED, DESIGNED and DIRECTED
by TANYA GERSTLE

Performance Studio One, VCA Drama
28 Dodds Street, Southbank

October 27 to November 6 2007

Bookings: vca-drama@unimelb.edu.au
Enquiries: 9685 9234
The mystery is that each cell knows its destiny...

A MASTERS by RESEARCH PROJECT
from the film by SALLY POTTER

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The cast and crew of YES who gave me faith in this way of working and made this stage of the process possible.

The VCA is proudly supported by
THE ENSEMBLE

YES was created by

Benedict Hardie
Carl Nilsson-Polias
Meredith Penman

Tim Potter
Anne-Louise Sarks
Terry Yeboah

with

Grant Cartwright (Company 2005)
Ella Watson-Russell (Company 2005)

Grand Cartwright (Company 2005)

Grant’s theatre credits include: For the MTC Enlightenment and Exploration King Oedipus, for La Mama The Chapel Perilous, for Malthouse Theatre/High Performance Co. Vaudeville X, for Here Theatre The Time Is Not Yet Ripe (Winner of Best Ensemble Cast - Green Room Awards, 2007), for 5 Kinds Theatre Bash: Latter Day Plays, for Chapel off Chapel Dog’s Barking and for Theatreworks Jet of Blood (Winner Best Ensemble Cast - Melbourne Fringe Festival, 2006). Film and TV credits include The Pacific and The Jammed.

Ella Watson-Russell (Company 2005)

Since graduating from the VCA Ella has performed with several different Melbourne companies and produced and performed shows for the Melbourne and Darwin Fringe Festivals. Most recently she completed a tour of the Patrick White award winning play Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset for Darwin Theatre Company.

CREATIVE TECHNICIANS

Tanya Gerstle
Andrew Gray
Richard Whitehouse
Terry Ryan

(with contributions from Carl Nilsson-Polias and Andrew Gray)

Alycia Hevey
Rohan Meddings
Daria Wray

Adaptation, Design and Direction
Assistant Direction
Lighting Design/Operation
Sound Design
Stage Manager/Sound Operation
Production Manager
Front of House Manager

This performance lasts an hour and a half with no interval, and contains adult themes and coarse language.

Terry Yeboah (Kitchen Worker)

Personally YES brings up a lot of questions that people are afraid to ask.

It crosses BOUNDARIES that people are afraid to cross - questions of cultural differences and how one decides to deal with it and come to some sort of reconciliation. To me this is a story bigger than the two central characters. It’s broader and universal, with themes such as LOVE, HATE, TERRORISM, COLOUR, and EAST versus WEST. It stretches to the struggles that we encounter every day around the world.

What I love about using the principles of Pulse with this text is using the human body, motive, space and language to reveal the metaphoric nature/meaning of the piece, which goes beyond just the performance space. The series of actions and the motives allow us to project the images we want. When the action is small it has a different meaning. When it’s big it also tells a different story.

We never disappear,

Or, at the very least, a kind of host..

Despite it being what we all most fear.

We’re certainly not finished when we die,

When we expire perhaps we change, at most

However hard the undertakers try.

We leave a stain. A fingerprint. Some mess. Perhaps some pain....

Every single creature feeds another.

Some fear, or doubt in someone else’s heart.

Everyone is everybody’s mother...

It’s really all about your point of view, depending where you’re standing on the earth....

“No” does not exist.

There’s only “yes”.
Grant Cartwright (He)

In my experience, everything is found and created in the abstract and through the physical; so when I was asked to return to the floor with Tanya, using her physical process of Pulse, undoubtedly my response was ‘Yes’! Our first collaboration in 2005, *Five Kinds of Silence*, like YES, was also a text not written for the stage. In both productions we have used Pulse not only as a theatre-making tool but also as a converting process bridging the two mediums through an organic physical experience of the text. This experience gives life to a world that is ripe and dripping with beauty, sweat, metaphor and meaning and tells the story in a heightened and unique way that no individual could quickly choreograph. In Pulse, the actor is the engine that powers invention and creation – and it has me addicted!

Benedict Hardie (Husband)

An Ode to the Unknown


what is not guaranteed

The dance is between the living body, space, light, movement and vibration.

what is not understood

With terrifying fastidiousness I can govern some portion of this dance. Or. I can leave it to you. You, who marshals lasagne of riddling complexity; making absurd my ill-wrought, bedroom, lumpen, potato.

what is not grasped

This world of chaos and synergy is not for pontificating purple postulators. It is for those who speak to discover what they want to say. For those who open doors in haunted houses. For those who embolden the stone to reveal the sculpture. For those who rob without a getaway. For those who refuse fear. You are their glorious gift.

what is unknown

Carl Nilsson-Polias (Kitchen Worker)

In Pulse, the actor needs to remain fully engaged with their own journey and commit to the action they are in, but must also have a clear awareness of the piece as a whole - what it needs and how it is composed: spatially, dynamically and texturally. Neither of these engagements is more important than the other, so we are searching for their synthesis, their resolving into equilibrium.

Meredith Penman (She)

The final chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is a 130-page unpunctuated monologue from Molly Bloom. Joyce wrote this monologue to represent the flesh and the bed. Her final ecstatic, exhausted words are “I said yes I will. Yes.”

Skin is everywhere in YES.

Olive, freckled, black, alabaster and mottled - the collective tones of our flesh are so beautiful.

I look closely, examining the imperfections of my own skin - bruises, marks and scars. Signatures from different events, it is confronting to reveal them. Imperfection and impermanence are difficult concepts to reconcile; as is zero, the void state of un-being and our differing notions of God. Grappling with these ideas in the physical realm of our process has been an honour and a joy.

Thank you to the poet Rumi, the musician Anouar Brahem and to Jean and Brian Dunn for taking me into Syria.

Tim Potter (Dish Pig)

We Are – Whizzer’s Performance Piece Extract

Boy, you think you’re smart

With your words and your wizardry?

“Yes I do. Yeah I really fucking do”.

Cos I’m on a dance floor.

I’m king of the fucking dance floor.

Everyone’s staring,

Flashlight beams of light,

This chick walks through,

Comes in from the right.

I could smell her a fucking mile away

A smell I couldn’t miss.

She was fucking gagging for it

Dripping

Like a wet, slippery fucking fish.

Shiny

Purple like her shoes.

She takes my hand

Walks me up, down, through,

In past the loos

In, out. 1 – 2.

That’s all it takes

She said if I wanted I could finish her off back at her place.

Yes please.

So now I grab her hand

We walk out on the street,

Heads held high.

We’re like fucking royalty we are,

No-one questions why

Cos we’re fucking amazing

we are…

On our way to get a souvlaki

Stop in at the local Indian,

Or maybe the Paki

Get a curry,

Bag of poppadoms

Hold your fucking horses!

Where’s she gone.

There you are.

Silence.

Dead air on the street.

Don’t you want to dance?

Don’t you want to dance with me?
Anne-Louise Sarks (Aunt, Friend)
Yes is a word
Yes is an action
Yes is a constant agreement to learn and explore
It's living and embracing life in all its ugliness and its lightness
It's openness
Yes is a room of artists bringing themselves to the space
Yes is a story
Yes is a world
Yes is the world
Yes is not happening somewhere else
Yes is us
It's you
It's me
Yes is a call to arms
Yes is a call into arms
In life as well as art, anything is possible provided there is love.

Ella Watson-Russell (Cleaner, Goddaughter)
……am i headed for the same brick wall
is there anything i can do about
anything at all?
except go back to that corner
and dig deeper, dig deeper this time
down beneath the impossible pain of our history
beneath unknown bones
beneath the bedrock of the mystery
beneath the sewage systems and the path train
beneath the cobblestones and the water mains
beneath the traffic of friendships and street deals
beneath the screeching of kamikaze cab wheels
beneath everything i can think of to think about
beneath it all, beneath all get out
beneath the good and the kind and the stupid and the cruel
there's a fire just waiting for fuel…… (From 'Fuel' by Ani DiFranco)

We try to bury, bleach and burn our hurt, our guilt, our doubts and passions. We patrol the borders of our selves armed with a bottle of 'banish', ready to eliminate any memory or feeling that touches us too close. We build walls, real and imagined, to keep life at a comfortable distance, opening the security gates only to those microbes we consider benign. We think that sanitation is possible. We forget that we are membranous creatures, easily invaded, touched and moved. We scrub and scour, but life (that which is desired and that which is not) is always there, on our skin, in our blood, and in our minds and hearts. If we can admit and take ownership of our histories we will find our brightest future. We must be brave and search through the mess of our lives, perhaps even the mess of those lives that came before us, get down into the muck and the filth and touch, feel and acknowledge it because only then will we discover the beauty and the possibilities we also threw away.

An atheist friend of mine once said that the war on terror boils down to saying my imaginary friend is better than your imaginary friend……
“…love, ultimately, is a stronger force than hate; and verse-by virtue of its apparent artifice-paradoxically allows us to express the complexities of thought and experience in a distilled, natural way.”  
(Sally Potter, Foreward to the screenplay, 2005)

Director’s Perspective

The Investigation
My research into this particular way of rehearsing with actors and text began in 2000. It emerged out of a training methodology I had evolved since 1989, called Pulse, where performers kinaesthetically embed and integrate a selection of performance and compositional principles in order to improvise with a shared performance language. Sound and light are equal players and are part of the process from the beginning. Pulse challenges the actor to work from a place where the conscious and unconscious meet, to synthesise inspiration and technical understanding. In order for the blood to pump, the heart to beat and the Pulse to be strong, all members of the ensemble must be in a state of heightened awareness.

What you are viewing is the emergence of a performance text. It is the result of an interrogation into Pulse and its collision with a film text.

“In the theatre, the imagination fills the space, whereas the cinema screen represents the whole, demanding that everything in the frame be linked in a logically coherent manner.”  
(Peter Brook, There Are No Secrets)

As the process evolved and the piece began to show itself, metaphorical imagery continually sabotaged the linear narrative and subverted representation. What emerged through this theatrical investigation was the unanticipated emphasis on the body: how the actor’s body paints the space through direct physical experience and memory. The body as content, as image and as witness. How thinking with the body and not working from the mind allows for surprising meetings on the rehearsal floor as the body of the actor responds to lust, desire, power and conflict. How the restrained emotional landscape of unspoken feelings in this text lends itself perfectly to a physicalization of this deep undercurrent.

“Desire is as much to do with the taking away of the other’s pain as with the mutual pursuit of pleasure. …It is an alternative, shared use of physical energy, and the special lucidity of the body to bestow, if only for a brief moment, an exemption. The body is everywhere in your film…”  
(John Berger, A letter to Sally Potter, 2005)

The Dance of the Personal and the Political
In the late 1960s, James Baldwin wrote that Western nations “have been caught in a lie, the lie of their pretended humanism; this means that their history has no moral justification, and that the West has no moral authority….This lie, has become a global problem…” It has led to bitterness and resentment, described today as the “rage of the Muslim world”. Sally Potter wrote YES after September 11. She felt an “urgent need to respond to the rapid demonisation of the Arabic world in the West and the parallel wave of hatred against the United States”.

When I saw the film, I was overwhelmed by the distillation of such large ideas and fascinated by the revelation of the Muslim experience through the vision of a Western artist. For me, it is about understanding the deeply felt pain of ‘the other’ in the context of privileged bourgeois complacency. When I look at my body of work as an artist, this has been my main pre-occupation.

“…I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.”

The last lines of James Joyce’s Ulysses, inspired Potter. Ultimately, uttering ‘Yes’ in the face of violence, suffering and disappointment is the only choice. It is an act of redemption.
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