The Space in Between: Four Languages in a Swamp

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This paper was presented as part of a performance, comprising the delivery of the paper, visual signifiers consisting of four watermelons and a large wooden tub half-filled with water, and a 'group dynamics demonstration table.' On this table I used a box of fruit to demonstrate the changing dynamics of the group involved in the project under discussion. As will become clear, the dynamics started badly and deteriorated to the point of near hysteria. Since this demonstration cannot adequately be translated into linguistic signs on a page, I will indicate here only the general nature of the demonstration as it progressed to its point of explosion.

The space: a lectern is placed downstage left; a very large wooden tub half-filled with water sits slightly upstage centre, with a table behind it. On the table are four large watermelons; downstage right is a large table, the 'group dynamics demonstration table,' and behind it a basket filled with fruit. A full bottle of vodka sits on the table. Facing all of this is the audience seating bank, and behind it a very large projection screen.

As the audience enter, a video of 'Inje,' the production under discussion in this paper, is playing silently on the screen, and continues throughout, with slides also projected onto it at various times.

SFX: Bulgarian music, quite loud, which fades out as I arrive at the lectern.

Welcome to what I am calling 'Bulgaria' – I don’t mean the country, but the experience I had in that country. This paper tells a story. It's a story called "The Space In Between", and it's about four languages and a swamp. I’ve been trying ever since 'Bulgaria' to explain to myself, and to others (you for instance), why this experience of cultural intercourse produced a lead ball for a baby.

'Inje' was an international co-production in 1995/1996 between the Melbourne group Hildegard (who initiated the project) and the Theatre Department of the New Bulgarian
University in Sophia, Bulgaria. The starting point for the project was a short story called "Inje" by the twentieth-century Bulgarian writer Jordan Yovkov, who based his story on an older traditional story. Hildegard obtained almost all the funds for the project from the Australia Council for the Arts and Arts Victoria (respectively the Federal and Victorian State Government funding agencies).

In the second half of 1995, three actor/devisers, one director and one 'manager' [loud Beckettian laughter] - me - spent almost three months in Sofia and Sozopol (a small holiday resort by the Black Sea). We created the show with three actor/devisers, one designer, one director and one manager [milder Beckettian laughter] from the Theatre Department. Later a vocal composer and a dance teacher from their side were brought in, and, of course, a host of others congregated around the project. At the end of the three months, the show was performed once in a festival in Sozopol. Five months later, the Bulgarian team travelled to Australia where the show was performed at the 1996 Adelaide Festival, in Melbourne (at Theatreworks), and in Sydney (at the Wharf Theatre). Most of this story relates to the first part of the project in Bulgaria, since that is where both groups experienced the most intense difficulties. Since that time, Hildegard has disbanded, but the Theatre Department of the New Bulgarian University has grown in strength.

The two groups had elements in common, but much more that was different. Hildegard commonly drew from culturally specific material (mainly Bulgarian, but also, for example, Spanish and Russian), using songs, dance and narrative as core material. Their shows were not a display of folk art, but new works for the theatre constructed from these elements. The stage personae of the performers were generally very open and the audience were acknowledged frequently. Their creative process was relatively unstructured, relying on improvisation in the rehearsal process to generate unexpected ways of expressing narrative. The group operated as a collective and produced a number of works based on traditional Bulgarian folk material. Audiences commonly expressed feelings of delight and warmth in response both to the strange amalgam of familiar and unfamiliar in the narratives and to the very simple and theatrically effective means of presenting them.

The work of the Theatre Department is led by director Vazkressia Vicharova and designer Zarco Ouzunov. The Department is a theatre training school in the only alternative university in Bulgaria, and the Department must constantly fight for its existence and be on guard against moves to abolish it. Vazkressia and Zarco control the direction of the work, using a highly structured approach both to the creative process and to the roles that individuals take on within that process. Their work is image-based, highly physical, intense, and avant-garde. The group also uses Bulgarian folk material (their own culture – or rather past culture), but it is de-constructed, broken down into fragments, and used like letters in the alphabet. Dance steps, for example, are purged of any emphasis, flow or continuity that make them 'dance,' and then used as building blocks with which to construct a new physical vocabulary. There is little attempt or interest in their work in communicating narrative and their stage personae remain mysterious and somewhat closed.

In essence, the Australians sought richness, wholeness, and ‘authenticity’ in a culture that is very different to the dominant culture in Australia, using whole dances and songs, or large sections of them, and intelligible narratives. We sought to give our audience an easily accessible, yet rich and evocative experience of (a now defunct) ‘cultural
otherness.' The Bulgarian group by contrast were busy deconstructing their own cultural material in an attempt to communicate a contemporary reality. The form they chose was the one suited to their strong sense of cultural fracture.

So what on earth were these two groups doing together!? This was a question we all asked ourselves one or two dozen times during the project. We were hoping to achieve a meeting of the two groups, and, in the space created between us, a place to work, create, learn, be open, experience, and enjoy. After several shows using traditional Bulgarian material, we wanted to work with real live contemporary Bulgarian artists. We never really learnt or understood what the Bulgarians were hoping for, but no doubt it was something similar. A documentary on the project was made in Australia by S.B.S. Television and it showed that each group wanted the meeting as much as the other.

So, there we were, off to live in Eastern Europe for three months, with two immensely different groups, two directors (we should have known!), and six actors, to make a new piece of theatre. I was the infrastructure [loud Beckettian laughter]. Oh, by the way, we also took three spouses, four children (all of whom soon got sick), and my brother popped over from America to see what all the buzz was about. Our Bulgarians hosts were more than amazed at this influx of Australians.

Just before arriving, one of our team dreamt that she was going to jail for three months….

_I indicate the watermelons centre stage._

Now, in the middle there, we have some watermelons and a tub. Because… I want to speak to you about the four 'languages' I experienced in the _Inje_ project, four 'languages' that we had to negotiate every day working in this 'cultural border territory.' Each one of these watermelons represents a language.

1. At a basic level, language may be defined as "an artificial system of signs and symbols, with rules for forming intelligible communications" (MacDonald, 1972: 739). The four languages I will discuss here are:

   **Spoken language**: what we usually mean when we speak of language, and the issues of translating from one to the other.

   **Theatrical language**: that is, the lexicalised set of codes, along with certain syntactical rules for their combination, the interrelated system of socially produced theatrical signs that identify and define a particular theatrical or period (Wiles, 1991: 14-15). Concepts and practices used by theatre-makers can be as unintelligible to other theatre-makers as can spoken languages.

   **Cultural language**: all the factors that inform and differentiate what people of different local cultures, with different sets of experiences and conditions, bring to a project, whether they do so consciously or not.

   **Individual language**: the somewhat artificial construction of self, a system of features, behaviours, and the learned, habitual 'rules' for interactions with others that define a person. Individual language is that which cannot be blamed on 'cultural difference' which, however, often tries
to hide behind "the shibboleth of national identity" (Pavis, 1996: 8).

I go to the 'group dynamics demonstration table' downstage right.

Now, over here, is my group dynamics demonstration table. And right here is a box of fruit. On this table I'm going to give you a running commentary on how all these people were actually working and getting along together.

**GROUP DYNAMICS 1: THE TRIBES DESCEND ON SOFIA**

*In this section I set up the opposition between the two groups using apples and oranges (three of each for the three actor/devisers on each side). The two directors are represented by potatoes, and the two managers, my Bulgarian counterpart and I, are represented by turnips (shrivelled up even before we started). Grapes represented the entourage on both sides.*

I go back to the watermelons table and lift one into the tub.

So, firstly, SPOKEN LANGUAGE:

I go to the lectern downstage left.

**(I) Spoken Languages:**

The array of spoken languages was bewildering. The basic two were, of course, English and Bulgarian. We employed a full-time translator in Sofia who was excellent, and she quickly became the most valued, and knowledgeable, person in the project. She not only knew what each person really meant, but was also the receiver of information from all kinds of sources. It was fascinating to see her own opinions gradually emerge through the translation, as she attempted to modify and ameliorate the 'text,' then became unable any longer to hide her frustration and her opinions. (*"Can't you get to the point any faster?", "That's too blunt. Rephrase."")

Only one of our number spoke Bulgarian (hers was a fluent but reportedly somewhat old fashioned idiom, having lived in Australia for most of her life). She had worked with the Bulgarians before and so was well placed to serve as the linchpin in the project. But this placed a huge burden on her, which she was disinclined to shoulder, and which would have prevented her from working inside the process as a performer. She also suffered, especially at the beginning, some personal dislocation I think: did she belong in Australia or Bulgaria? Sofia was familiar yet unfamiliar, she had worked with Vazkressia before, but the situation we were in now was very different. Her daughter was 18 months old, and the first to fall ill….

Many in the Bulgarian team spoke English to varying degrees, but Vazkressia and Zarco, co-director and designer, did not. Their manager, Tzvetelina Yosiffova, thankfully spoke English very well. Vazkressia and I often spoke in German together, but my German was scarcely better than bad high school German; trying to speak about concepts, methods, production details and the psychology of why the project was all so incredibly difficult – forget it!

Zarco, the designer, spoke only Bulgarian and Armenian. I had no common language with him, and, although we smiled to each other a lot (at the beginning), trying to understand production and design details and concepts under these conditions was
quite impossible. Furthermore, he is the kind of designer who to some extent invents the design as he erects it.

Whatever common languages we did have, leaving aside the translator for the moment, were able to facilitate basic conversation, but not the creation of a complex artistic work. Not being able to really engage with each other directly about work, and often only superficially on a human level, was of course a major — but certainly not the only — cause of many of the difficulties we all experienced.

And the poor translator! Translating a conversation between two people is relatively easy. Make that every day for ten weeks, increase the number of people to about fifteen, add artistic concepts and disagreements, tensions and different theatrical languages, then put the translator in the middle of a rehearsal room with 250 kgs of clay, water, wailing (both inside and outside the rehearsal room), stomping (inside and outside …). I think it was only the intrigue that kept the translator alive.

I’m happy to report one positive result of this confusion of spoken languages. By the time Vazkressia had left Australia to return to Bulgaria, after hundreds of frustrating attempts to communicate, globules of Bulgarian, German and English had coagulated into what was literally a new language. She and I had at least a partial sense of which words in which language meant what to the other person. It was a small achievement, but we were proud of it.

I go to the dynamics table.

GROUP DYNAMICS 2: ALLEGIANCES FORM

Here I describe how the groups of three apples and three oranges soon changed into two apples, two oranges and a third group consisting of one apple and one orange. One member from each team had not worked with their respective groups before and did not sympathise fully with their working methods or allegiances. A strong bond quickly formed between them. The two turnips were already eyeing off the bottle of vodka, and one - that's me - has worked hard to stop the Australian group from returning home three days after their arrival.

I go to watermelon table, and lift another watermelon into the tub: THEATRICAL LANGUAGES

(II) Theatrical Languages:

By 'theatrical language', I do not of course mean 'the way arty people talk funny.' I’m referring to the interrelated system of socially produced theatrical signs, and the syntactical connection between signs that identify and define a particular theatrical genre or historical period (Wiles, 1991: 14-15). The 'vocabulary' of performance modes consists of 'grammatical units,' or building blocks, that, when combined in a certain way, create a performance of a particular kind. If you use certain blocks and put them together in one way, you end up with something that most people would call ‘dance’ or ‘the well-made play,’ or ‘the musical,’ and so on. If you change the elements only slightly, newspapers are confused and don’t know which section of the arts page to put you on.

Particular theatrical languages can be as unintelligible to some as Bulgarian is to me
and as difficult to articulate or translate. In fact, to performers engaged in creating a work, they can be even harder to grasp than a spoken language, because the vocabulary often needs to be understood by your whole body in order to be understood at all. Within the parameters of a single project, there usually isn’t time to get anywhere near learning a new theatrical language.

In Inje, the two groups differed profoundly in their choice of building blocks, the way they would put them together, the emotional colour they painted them with, and so on. They had the base material (that is, the narrative, Bulgarian dance and song) in common, but nothing else.

When Hildegard made a performance, they set out with a strong intention to communicate a coherent narrative to the audience. They took Bulgarian folk dances, for example, and broke them down into smaller units in order to from an emotionally open and expressive gesture. The gaze is present, open, and 'human.’ Often, they would speak directly to the audience, telling a story through these dance gestures, whole dances, songs and text.

Vazkressia has little interest in narrative and builds her performances on the performers’ use of energy, presence, sound and imagery. There is an internalised, abstracted intensity that is shaped and regulated by strong objective rules. Actors do not interact with one another on the level of daily life (normal eye contact, dialogue, etc.), but are strongly conscious of the other’s presence, rhythm, and energy and are keenly aware of the way in which spatial dynamics are affected and indeed determined by their bodies in space.

The influence of Eugenio Barba's work on 'pre-expressivity' can be seen here. Barba describes this heightened state of presence as a state of performance readiness, encouraged by placing oneself in a situation of "structured stress," involving "an extraordinary play of related asymmetries...which require great energy expenditure in order to maintain a new balance" (Yarrow, 1997: 7). Performers working in this mode seek to attain what Jaques Lecoq calls disponibilitè, which roughly translates as 'a state of being unattached or available.' Lecoq describes this state as being "a kind of total awareness, a sense of being at one with the context, script, if such here be, actors, audience, theatre space, oneself and one's body" (Yarrow, 1997: 41).

Vaskresia and Zarco use 'obstacles' to co-erce the actor's body into a state of greater concentration and pre-expressive energy, as the actors are asked either to resist the obstacles or to overcome them. These obstacles may take the form of costume hindrances (long, thin sticks attached to costumes, forcing the actor to move in a new way to avoid breakages and snagging on other actors) as well as set obstructions.

The translation of these theatrical languages was not achieved. In rehearsal, there was a great deal of confusion on both sides about what was being asked of them, resistance to each other's methods, and a profound difference of opinion about the shape and goals of the potential creation. In this there were no longer two distinct groups, as individual members of the groups understood to a lesser or greater degree what someone on the other side was talking about. The translator translated the words perfectly well, but that didn't get us very far. Most attempts to explain and convince each other lead to frustration and the use of words like 'sabotage,' 'rejection,' and other somewhat stronger expressions of displeasure. It was often the case that all creativity was stifled as paralysis set in, because no-one knew where they were or where they
were supposed to be heading.

I should mention here that there were four basic elements of the show:

(i) The structural backbone consisted of ritual events, in particular elements of traditional Bulgarian mourning ceremonies. For example, a mock burial ceremony involved the performers making a small clay figurine with a large phallus, called a *ghereman*.

(ii) The narrative from Yovkov’s short story was incorporated in a somewhat unidentifiable way.

(iii) Individual and choral physical and vocal performance work. The vocal score consisted of words and phrases rhythmically delivered in both Bulgarian and English.

(iv) The show as a whole, what the combination of these elements produced (in good art, 1+1=3 or more).

The design consisted of clay (350 kgs – and please, do yourself a favour, don’t ever do this yourself), water (32 metal buckets full of it), and fire (across the back of a raised stage area). Many hundreds of rough sticks formed the wall that dissected the performing area, while other sticks were attached to costumes. A very large umbrella dominated one part of the space.

The costumes consisted of traditional clogs and authentic traditional garments, some of them over ninety years old, which were promptly covered in clay and water, and broken down with sticks.

*I go to dynamics table.*

**GROUP DYNAMICS THREE: ‘TOUR LUST’**

I describe how rehearsals are progressing - very badly. Beer and vodka are not helping so far, but I swig from the bottle on the table anyway. Vaskressia offers to resign from the project, but is persuaded to continue. Our director has finally moved out onto the floor to do his thing, which progresses very, very slowly. I eat a pencil or two rapidly as I watch. The apples and oranges (especially the apples - that’s our team) are looking bruised and battered, after stomping and running up and down the room all day (FOR WHAT?). My laptop computer clicks away in the background calculating the budget in three currencies. I relate how we all went to a magnificent folk festival in a beautiful village called Koprivstitsa. It takes place every five years and people come from all over the world to see it. Our colleagues tell us the Communists organised it to keep the masses happy. Our translator admits that she hates folk culture.

One of the fruits, that shall remain unidentified, begins to experience ‘tour lust’ for one of the oranges, and learns the Bulgarian for “what a spunk” (“strahotno parche!”). More swigs of vodka.

*I go to the watermelon table, and place one more watermelon into the container, which is filling up fast: CULTURAL LANGUAGE!*
Geertz defines 'culture' as:

a system of symbols thanks to which human beings confer a meaning on their own experience. Systems of symbols, created by people, shared, conventional, ordered and obviously learned, furnish them with an intelligible setting for orienting themselves in relation to others or in relation to a living work and to themselves" (1973: 130).

Pavis states more simply that

Human culture is a system of significations which allows a society or a group to understand itself in its relationships with the world" (1996: 2).

By 'cultural language' then, I am referring to those signifiers that carry information about the more or less socially agreed meanings of things or from which socially agreed meanings are constructed. Cultural language is an instance of "an artificial system of signs and symbols, with rules for forming intelligible communication" (MacDonald, 1972: 739). Actions, objects, ways of speaking, specific terms, and so on are interpreted in a way that is more or less shared by a 'local culture' and which are only partially or not at all comprehensible to those of a different local culture. The 'text' formed by cultural signifiers is read, to a large degree, by means of its context.

The material we were dealing with in Inje was very complex and rooted deeply in Bulgarian culture. The ritual elements of mourning, mock mourning, rain making, and burial, and the de-constructed forms of Bulgarian folk dance and song, were elements we didn’t fully understand of course. We gleaned a lot of information about the rituals from a guest anthropologist and the incredibly beautiful dance teacher [I take a large swig of Vodka: STRAHOTNO PARCHEI]. But all the difficulties we were experiencing with 'spoken' and 'theatrical language' prevented us from attaining more than a cursory acquaintance with these rituals. We were constantly confused in rehearsals about when you could drop coins into the buckets of water and what kinds of reverberations that action might have for a Bulgarian audience, let alone an Australian one. I’m sure a lot of the Bulgarian audience recognised the elements and made meaning from it, even if they did ask themselves what on earth these strange people were doing with them.

Clearly the show was an expression of grief. As a whole, I think the show was dealing with cultural origins (mainly theirs, but also ours) and the fragmentation of cultural traditions. Koprivistitsa was both an amazing experience of this cultural identity and a very sad reminder that it no longer exists there except on a few concrete stages every five years.

I go to dynamics table.

GROUP DYNAMICS FOUR: DECOMPOSITION

The groups are now in chaos, with apples, oranges, turnips, potatoes and grapes all over the place. The potatoes are watered down with vodka, to no avail. Pieces of fruit of all descriptions are searching for personal and working relationships wherever they can find them. The turnips have become close friends. Agreements and disagreements, yelling and crying are inter-woven in highly complex patterns. Tour lust is increasing but NOTHING IS HAPPENING! Vodka is consumed in large gulps now.
I go to watermelon table, a little unsteadily, and place the last watermelon into the container. It barely fits: INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGE!

(IV) Individual Languages:

I’m referring here to the way that individuals do (or do not) express themselves, the way we communicate, or fail to, the way we hide behind 'the shibboleth of cultural difference,' bury our heads in paper bags, hide behind old performance habits, and so on. I think there’s an awful lot of hiding behind cultural difference. Of course, the differences exist, but in the end we are all responsible for our own behaviour, and no amount of external causes will change that. The same applies to our performance habits. In physically based theatre, the tendency to hide and close off your own personality seems even stronger than in more text-based forms. It’s easy to get sucked into an imagined physical intensity, which can sometimes be another way of saying that you’ve put on someone else’s costume and are more than happy to keep it that way. In Inje, the individual work which each performer developed was successful at communicating to the audience according to the degree to which they 'wore their own clothes,' spoke their own individual language, openly. I’d have to say that the proportion of success to failure here was about 50/50. And there were some who, at least some of the time, and a few who, perhaps most of the time, had no desire to show anyone their clothes, who wanted them locked away in the cupboard where no-one could criticise them.

It was, I think, common in this project to confuse the other ‘language’ difficulties with a lack of responsibility for one’s own behaviour. But of course that kind of hiding is not unique to this group of people….

It was all these issues of spoken language, theatrical language, cultural issues, individual 'idiosyncrasies,' our own naivety before the project began, and the Bulgarian team's conditions of work and life, that produced what I can only describe as 'Icebergs In Bulgaria'. Every day I was struck again and again by the fact that no matter how hard we all tried (or didn’t try depending on who you were), we could not get any closer to each other or to some resolution to the problems we were all facing. Both sides of the equation seemed to be carrying huge invisible weights below the surface that kept us all apart. And somewhere in the room was ‘the show’ which I came to refer to as ‘the elephant.’ It was very big, and very stubborn. Nothing any of us did could move it any faster or make it go where we wanted it to. And the most frustrating thing was, we couldn’t even see it! The bloody thing was invisible!

I go to the dynamics table.

GROUP DYNAMICS FIVE: UTTER CHAOS

Early on the morning we are due to leave Sofia, I am called urgently to one of our group’s apartment. She and her son are being held at axe-point by the landlord and his wife, who refuse to believe that we have paid a deposit for the telephone bill: "She no pay, she no go!". The police arrive. Eventually all the fruit arrive in Sozopol, a holiday resort for everyone but us. While Sofia had few resources which you could not however get hold of, in Sozopol there are none. Allegiances between fruit types have broken down completely now, as apple beats orange, turnip beats apple, potato beats everyone, and we can’t get into the venue to set up. Lust, vodka, food. "Why don’t you come down to the nude beach?" AAAGGHHH! "If you ever treat me that way again,
I'll…", "SHE'S A FAT COW!", "they want us to find a FROG!!?? In Sozoppol!!??",
"Christ they have no idea what art is!". FRUIT BASHING FRUIT, BASH BASH BASH!!
WHY WON'T SHE JUST FUCK ME! AAAHHHGGGHHH!!

I pour the entire remaining contents of the vodka bottle over my head.

**SOMEONE GET ME OUT OF HERE!!!!**

Lighting and video snap out, and Bulgarian music snaps in. It is a mournful, stirring
sound. During this music, a series of slides are projected onto the screen. They show
snaps of the combined group at work and play in Bulgaria. The last few slides show me
with my family, and the last one shows me and my then four year-old son hugging in
the Bulgarian mountains.

As the last slide and music fades out, lights fade up and I move to the watermelons
container.

So there you are: four languages in a swamp: not much room for creativity there now is
there?

_I go to the lectern._

What about the show? What was it like? Did it communicate…something? Did it
'translate' from Bulgaria to Australia? Well, no, and yes.

Colin Counsell writes that

> [t]he significance of a given object is derived from the cultural context in
> which it is placed; it is a sign in the wider semiotic system. When that context
> undergoes radical change the meaning may alter, for it can draw upon - be
> mobilised within - different discourses (1996, 76-77).

I think the show only ever really 'worked' once, in Sozopol, in a small white church,
under the most appalling performance conditions I have ever encountered. Sozopol is a
holiday resort, where everyone else, including the festival organisers it seems, was
relaxing on the clothed and the unclothed beaches. We had one afternoon to set up the
show, with bucket loads of screaming, and tension, and little common language (of any
kind). Photographers flashed away with their cameras all the way through the
performance, one even climbing on audience members to get a better shot, until hauled
out by the pants at the instigation of one of our crew members. But in Bulgaria it had a
cultural context within which the 'density of signs' that is theatrical performance seems
to have been more or less coherent. Something very alive was happening in the room
with the cultural currency of the audience. The show was expressing the cultural reality
of the country in the only way that Vazkressia, Zarco, and their team felt was a true
expression. It was an expression of the decomposition of cultural forms. The
performance trod a very thin line between precision and chaos, between the destruction
and reconstruction of traditional folk art forms. What seemed to be a huge formless
mess on stage was balanced by the security and regularity of ritual forms, and the very
precise timing of each section of the show (via bell ringing and sound effects).

By the time we performed in Australia, almost everyone was markedly more relaxed. In
terms of performance and production values, the Australian season was far more
polished, the rhythms were more clearly differentiated, and so on, but it wasn’t enough. In Australia it became merely a performance in a theatre. The new context, within which the theatrical sign systems found themselves, produced something that spoke very strongly to a certain section of the population (mostly Balkan migrants) who said they loved it because it spoke to them of their own cultural identity. There was a very definite aesthetic quality about the show that some people here were very excited by. But in general it was a curiosity, a performance which irritated, in a style which often alienated the audience rather than engaged them. It was also in the wrong space. It really belonged back in that Church in Sozopol where the traditional material being tampered with was in the walls and in the floor. Black box theatres, in Adelaide, Melbourne or Sydney, no matter how wonderful in their own way, were just not right for it. The box office figures were, well, not terrific, shall we say.

*Inje* as created in Bulgaria, under the dominant influence of the Bulgarian team, was not a piece that was translatable. It couldn’t be separated from its cultural context without dying. Despite the easier conditions in Australia, the elephant wasn’t any smaller and we still couldn’t see it. So, the elephant won, sitting immobile in the swamp. The meeting of cultures and people in ‘the space in between’ did not happen.

If I were asked to assess the important elements of the project in terms of the meeting of two groups from two cultures, I’d mark it like this:

- COMMUNICATION N
- TRANSLATION N
- PAIN H1
- DISLOCATION H1

but, on the other hand,

- INTENSITY OF EXPERIENCE H1
- INTENSITY OF FRIENDSHIPS H1
- VALUE OF EXPERIENCE H1

You’ll notice that all the marks are very definitely at one end of the scale or another.

We were lost in Bulgaria. We found ourselves in clothes that weren’t ours, in a place where we didn’t know or understand the cultural language, where the spoken languages were frustrating and blocking. We were lost, and our colleagues lived and worked in conditions that seemed to prevent them from giving us a map.

The two tribes were there to meet and create. One tribe was busy deconstructing itself while the other was in need of wholeness. A very large chasm opened up between us, and many things fell in, never to be seen again. It was very painful. There were many failures. It was as if the chasm just stayed open and open and open… But the relationships we formed with the Bulgarians were also very intense. I’m sure it was as a result of this yawning chasm that we missed them intensely when they left to return to Bulgaria. Over the whole period we grew to love them, well, most of them, and admire them. ‘Bulgaria’ is in our souls and will never drop out. I want to be there now.
At the end of the project, when my fellow turnip yelled down the phone at me from thousands of kilometres away, it seemed the project to come to its inevitable and final conclusion. Five years later, I still cannot think of it without a feeling of sadness.

I go into the space in between, in front of the four languages in a swamp.

*Sfx: fade up a Bulgarian version of the jazz tune ‘Summer Time’, with Bulgarian Church chanting as back-up vocals.*

When you bring groups or individuals from different cultures together to create something, the success of the project, or lack of it, depends on the willingness, or lack of it, and the ability, or lack if it, of each individual to step into the gulf which opens up in front of you. To step in openly, willingly, persistently, and be there for what might happen, takes courage. It's up to everyone, individually, to take responsibility for their own participation.

"Summertime" increases in volume. Over the top we can hear, and on the screen we can see, the final images from the performance of Inje. This consists of each member of the group telling the camera their names and where they are from. Fade out video, lights and sound.

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