Inner and Outer: "Open Theatre" in Peter Brook and Joseph Chaikin

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> 'The actor must dig inside himself for responses, but at the same time must be open to outside stimuli. Acting was the Marriage of these two processes.'
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> <div align="right">Albert Hunt paraphrasing
Peter Brook in rehearsal.</div>

An Englishman out in India once said to me that one of the most significant lessons he had learnt abroad stemmed from the Indians' apparent capacity to treat life and the self as single and continuous; in contrast, he said, the English tended to treat life as something outside themselves, something that had to be coped with, like a dinner party. What is interesting about this observation is not the relative extent of its sociological rigour but the profound ease with which it treats wholeness as self-evidently valuable. Wholeness or harmony is, like truth or beauty or goodness, of intrinsic worth, a condition of integration that must be sought if it is lacking. Peter Brook's work in Paris over the last fifteen years (culminating in a production of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*) seems in some ways to be a product of that need:

> Our research in Paris is directed towards trying to find a new form that can carry the same spectrum (as Shakespeare) . . . Perhaps you might say that we are looking for passages--passages that connect the inner and outer worlds.[1]

Quite independently of Brook, Joseph Chaikin (in the context of his attempt to stage a myth, *The Serpent* based on *Genesis*) locates in precisely this area the subject of his ambition:

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The inner and the outer--there's the impossible study.[2]

Inner and outer: amidst ubiquitous duality a coincidence of impulses towards wholeness. Wholeness is richness in the theatre first as life is rich, that is to say infinitely bountiful, multifaceted, a quality we admire in Shakespeare. For Brook "there is either the author who explores his *inner* experience in depth and darkness, or else the author who shuns these areas, exploring the *outside* world-- each one thinks his world is complete. If Shakespeare had never existed we would quite understandably theorise that the two can never combine."[3] Passages between inner and outer worlds make for depth and range of representation, for density in the resonances between levels of meaning in performance.

Again, and perhaps more importantly, wholeness is richness in the theatre in terms of that which accrues to a phenomenon when it realises its potential most completely. The theatre must yoke together inner and outer as it gives form to impulse, as it makes visible the preoccupations of author and character. Joseph Chaikin discusses the implications of the notion that, in Brook's words, "the stage is a place where the invisible can appear:"[4]

> This challenge of the unspeakable in a natural situation may
> be that when a character is drinking water he is wondering
> if there is a God. When we locate the *inside* of a situation
> in its abstract and elusive textures, we then try to make
> the thing *visible*. . . .[5]

In *The Empty Space* Peter Brook discusses his attempt to replace with a more complex alignment of mutually supportive correspondences the all too easy existing equations between action and language:

> We were trying to smash the apparently watertight divisions
> between the private and the public man--the *outer* man
> whose behaviour is bound by the photographic rules of
> everyday life, who must sit to sit, stand to stand,--and the
> *inner* man whose anarchy and poetry is usually expressed
> only in his words.[6]

The location and representation of resonances between inner and outer worlds is, however, problematic at each stage of the evolution of a theatre work. For the dramatist the problem is not only to unite private and public worlds in a comprehensive manner but to commun- icate, to make autonomous that vision. In order to do this the drama- tist must employ the resources of form, specifically its self-

transcending capacity by which form injects into the body of a work patterns, structural and thematic, that are alien to but supportive of that which was originally conceived.[7]

For the actor the problem is that this form whether psychologically realistic or abstractly representational, is alien, other, (outer) and yet, if it is to be played with truth, must be located within the horizon of personal intellectual or emotional experience (inner). Peter Brook rehearsing the 1970 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, second week, fifth day, exhorts the actors:

It must be in your rhythm or in no rhythm at all.[8]

The actor must, above all, be true to himself. Same production, fifth week, third day:

The impulse must come wholly from the outside, wholly from the words he is speaking.[9]

Inner and outer, not a contradiction but a measure of the profound difficulty of the actor's task--to broaden in rehearsal both his or her imaginative experience and that depicted in the text till a point of resonance, comprising both elements, is discovered. "Truth" in performance is a function of fidelity both to text and to personality, for, as Brook puts it, "there is always both a rhythm to be found and a particular actor to find it."[10] Same production, third day:

You can only understand if you use the right experience of your own to draw from. . . . This is what Shakespeare is saying too. . . . He is saying, "my words are only an approximation to my experience, so you must bring your own experience to them."[11]

In speaking for Shakespeare, Brook addresses the actor; the words he uses could, of course, just as meaningfully, be addressed to the audience. The extent to which an audience can "believe" in a production is a function of the extent to which it is able to locate within the drama experience with which it is able imaginatively to identify. Meaning, that is to say, is apprehended through recognition, through a coincidence in the memory of the appending self and the object of its scrutiny. To find a play meaningful the audience must, see themselves (inner) in it (outer).

II

In the theatre truth is then a collaborative construct, a product of what is usually a three-stage dialectic (author-actor-audience) between inner and outer. In this process the director, as one who has overall responsibility for the production, must contrive to ensure that smooth transitions of impulse take place between these terminals of sensibility. He or she must locate within the world of a text a segment of significance that it shares with the society for which it is to have meaning. Again, in order to enable the actors to absorb and transmit these "truths" the director must undertake to help them establish regions of significant resonance between the poles of their dual loyalty--to the text and circumstance, to the self and the play, to inner, that is to say, and outer.

Any role may quite reasonably be expected to have feelings and concepts with which the performer can easily identify because they directly echo aspects of his or her own personality. Here, where inner and outer begin as one, the relatively trivial function of the director is to help the performer to use personal experience to breathe conviction into a role. As long as the correspondences are direct, this is Affective Memory in its least complex and most useful aspect-- the use of memory (inner) to feed a role (outer) with reality.

The principal problems in the art of characterisation, however, occur when inner and outer do not coincide in this way; when a role has features which are not as easy to locate within the usually more limited world of the actor. Charles Marowitz, once a close associate of Brook's, puts the challenge bluntly:

> We all know what it is like to want to dominate other people, but that doesn't qualify us to express the enormity of Tamburlaine's ego. . . . The problem is not evoking emotions but enlarging them to meet the demands of demanding material.[12]

Here it has traditionally been the inclination of directors influenced by the reigning Method of the Actor's Studio to extend the application of Affective Memory to those areas in which an escalation of experience is required. In keeping with the Studio's supposedly unassailable assumption that "the actor has only himself at his disposal," that "he can work only with *his* emotions, *his* temperament, *his* store of memories"[13] the tendency has been to work from the inside out, to magnify the actor's personal ideas or modes of behaviour to meet the needs of a role. With the profound premium placed on true feeling[14] in this method, any other approach--such as a contrivance of

a means of uniting inner and outer by working from the outside in--is easily dismissed as unforgivably false.

This emphasis on true feeling, when combined with the need for the escalation of emotions or concepts beyond the terms of their natural life in the performer, can quite easily lead to intensity without communicative shape, what Marowitz calls "a passionate letter without postage."[15] Joseph Chaikin:

> I really can't stand the actor who is pumping up feeling and saying, "It only matters how I feel, and if I'm full enough, its groovy." I'm just repelled by that after a certain point. . . . [The actor is] completely locked out of any ensemble experience . . . and leaves no room for the spectator.[16]

Again, in working from the inside out there is the danger of performers deflating characters to fit the lesser contours of their experience; as Marowitz puts it, "Small actors can make small characters out of large ones."[17] Joseph Chaikin:

> As the actor develops techniques of emotional memory, by consciously approaching or paralleling the character's experience through his own, he weakens his powers of empathy. . . . The character of the emotion and the emotion of the character slowly get evened out; even though the mannerisms of the character may be very different, the sphere of feeling stays the same.[18]

In both these cases the inner state remains trapped, unfertilised by the outer to which it is unequal. Peter Brook:

> If you cultivate emotional states, . . . you cannot find anything.[19]

III

In Brook as in Chaikin the danger of unproductive self-enclosure is circumvented by a novel reversal of impulses whereby the performer takes as his or her cue an externally imposed condition and uses it to work inwards into emotion or character. Joseph Chaikin:

> The internal is charted territory; the access to it is through its shapes and rhythms. Although the inside needs to be replenished each time, there is another kind of attention that must be tuned to the outside.[20]

The "outside" provides a discipline--a rhythm tapped on a drum, a set of objects or musical instruments, a stance or movement pattern-- which generates an energy formally related to a certain aspect of the character's way of being. Insofar as this energy has the advantage of being couched in an immediately apprehensible system, a set of specially conceived rules that govern its unique mode of existence, it invites a response undiminished by the possible relative paucity of the actor's psychological resources. The actor's response, in turn, triggers "zones in us which know more than we think they do"[21] and generates through a pattern of autonomous suggestion, a state of character. If the exercise is appropriate to the need, it provides the actor with extended scales of emotion that are at once inner and outer, the person and the exercise, the actor and the role. Eileen Blumenthal describes some of Chaikin's attempts to work "from the outside in:"

> One actor would begin a simple, repeatable gesture using both body and voice, not selecting in advance what the action should express, but playing with it until it touched on a clear condition; that actor then approached a second, who tried to copy the forms exactly, thereby being led to their emotional content. . . . Using kinetic impulses to locate inner states, actors were able to discover emotions that had not been in the experience before.[22]

In another exercise Chaikin "had the actors 'try on' different bodies to discover the emotions to which those physical states corresponded. . . . They let physical images of inanimate objects (such as weapons) inform their movement in order to discover emotional states."[23] In each of these exercises externally imposed impulses are used to tap directly into the states of being they generate, uncomplicated by personalised analysis and the labels of preconception. A participant in a Chaikin chord exercise describes the immediacy of its influx:

> I hear breathing. . . . I listen to it and feel it. It is regular and hypnotic. It turns into a drone, and I drone too. . . . I can hear it all around me; I am within it. I match myself to it. I don't want to alter it but to let it alter me.[24]

In his book on *The Making of A Midsummer Night's Dream*, David Selbourne quotes Brook conducting a chord:

He told them "not to control the sound intellectually, by mind," but to "let it govern them:"[25]

To control the sound intellectually is to restrict its effect to that which the mind already knows--which is, of course, to defeat the purpose of an exercise designed to liberate. The sound, or any simulated external impulse, must be allowed to invade and transform beyond preconception the performer's state of being:

> The sound takes you into something different. A different way of holding yourself, of standing.[26]

The sound works as an objective correlative for a realm of energy which till then is not known by the actor to possess such analogues. The freshness of the association discovers vitality in emotions which, if self-consciously cultivated, would spell deadness. All such generalised emotion is anathema to Brook: Selbourne's book is replete with exclamations condemning analysis before action:

> Don't use logic . . . (and) don't give explanations.[27]

Again, fifth week third day,

> Discover, do not comment.[28]

The familiar effects of music upon mood are contingent not upon sound merely but rhythm. Brook's rehearsals of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are particularly noteworthy for their use of the empirically known but as yet little understood links between rhythm and states of being:

> Brook taps on a drum two differentiated rhythms which he wants respectively from the mechanicals and the courtiers. As a result, Theseus' "The wall, methinks, being sensible, should curse again" has the heightened arrogance of a swift and (as if) princely wit, while Pyramus' reply, "No, in truth, sir, he should not," with its heavy round vocables, has more than ever the pedestrian gait of the sturdy Bottom.[29]

Effects that actors fail to master in their analysis (mind to text, inner to outer) may be achieved through rhythms struck in action (drumbeat to emotion, outer to inner). Here the skill of the director lies in using his or her experience of such effects to design exercises that may reasonably be expected to induce distinctive attributes of

character. For Chaikin, "forming an exercise is one of the most important things a theatre person can do. When he can envision a kind of behaviour, a kind of ambiance, a kind of interrelating, a kind of environment, a kind of physical life, the kind of sounds, and then to find the proper exercise, the actor is invited to envision as well as to inhabit that realm."[30] The work is of course entirely empirical, conducted without a scientific or psychological understanding of the reasons for the effects achieved. In workshop free access to emotion through sound or rhythm, or indeed through object, stance or movement, produces a body of correlations which may later be focussed to serve the specific needs of a particular production. Here the difference between the experience of one actor in workshop and another in rehearsal is usually a matter of minor modifications merely, of fine tuning once the receiver is sensitive to the general import of a certain range of transmitted impulses. Sound and rhythm can suggest only, the rest is exposure, perception, susceptibility--in a word, openness.

IV

For Chaikin working consistently from the outside in has the more general advantage of encouraging actors to cultivate "a consciousness of not only what's going on inside you but what is going on around you and in the room and area that you are in."[31] In its broadest application, the amalgamation of inner and outer through ingress allows the actor to view the inner world of the drama as continuous with a simultaneously present outer, alternative order of reality. In Brook too the performer is "called upon to be completely involved while distanced, detached without detachment."[32] It is from this commitment to clearing passages between the inner and the outer, to resensitising performers to the influence of autonomous and therefore edifying orders of experience that Chaikin's "The Open Theatre" took its name. Wider than performance technique merely, Openness in Chaikin is a fundamental principle of theatre demanding a comprehensive "susceptibility to continue to change"[33] internally through contact with larger external orders of being. Openness in Chaikin is an acute inner flexibility sustained by a humble recognition of the need to stay "in process"[34] the need to "avoid rigid artistic principles"[35] which ossify and dam the inner:

When you make a real discovery of some kind, you have to be careful not to become so devoted to it that you get stuck and can't evolve beyond it.[36]

Success spells danger as it enshrines the inner, makes of it a dogma that is sterile for lack of subsequent fertilisation from without. The performer's capacity to grow is a function of his or her ability to dissolve the hem of pride that attends success, to abjure any accruing knowledge that would dictate from (and so restrict to) the inner a future course. Instead, what is favoured is a constantly submissive readiness to be transformed through wider external suggestion. "Growth" means "one has to be able to shed, and to give up."[37]

For Brook too internal growth comes not out of firmness of belief but from an active receptivity to the kinetic agency of external truths:

In the theatre there is no stopping place, no sudden final solution in which the atom is exploded. The moment any-thing stands still it dies, and every answer begs a new question.[38]

John Kane quotes Brook in rehearsal:

No matter how long we worked on a play, we could never come to the end of the work. There could never be any complacency or boredom because we would be starting on a journey that has no end, and surely for the creative artist the journey itself is the reward. The moment you arrive anywhere, you limit the distance you might have travelled.[39]

John Heilpern discusses Brook's commitment to "openness":

Brook is in the business of research--opening up questions . . . part of the crippling nature of the work is that the moment anything is a success it must be abandoned. If not, it becomes set and *closed*--unable to teach anything fresh.[40]

If the word "Open" consciously denotes a central and stringently defined commitment in Chaikin, it occurs with precisely the same connotation in Brook:

Everything, stage, setting, costume, speaking, creative acting (must be) in a state of finding; of not expecting fresh solutions, but keeping *open*.[41]

Again, if the actor is internally "relaxed, *open* and attuned, then the invisible (the outer, the role, the play) will take possession of him

(inner); through him (outer), it will reach us (inner)."[42]

<div align="center">V</div>

As a creed more than a local insight of more or less limited application, Openness becomes, in Brook and Chaikin, the principal dynamic attending not only the performer's growth through receptivity to external stimuli, but most relationships that contribute to the creation of a theatre event. In the much debated controversy as to the relative balance of authority between director and author, Brook allows (and Chaikin practices without explicitly admitting it) extensive adaptation that simultaneously respects the text (outer) and a contemporary order of sensibility in society (inner). In *The Empty Space* Brook argues that insofar as "all the printed word can tell us is what was written on paper, not how it was once brought to life"[43] a "living theatre" must acknowledge that "every form once born is mortal; every form must be reconceived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it."[44] Just as actors must, if they are to grow, relinquish their knowledge of the means to past success, so also directors, if their productions are to retain freshness, must abandon remembered measures and "Open" themselves (inner) to the promptings of texts (outer) uninjured by the passage of lapsed truths.

The sensibility upon which this influence is to be allowed freely to impinge, being "Open" to an alternative outer order--the social climate in which a play is to be performed--would ideally quite naturally marry the two at a point of felt resonance marking a contemporary and vital truth. A theatrical "representation" is then for Brook "not an imitation or description of a past event. . . . It takes yesterday's action and makes it live again in every one of its aspects-- including its immediacy. In other words a representation is what it claims to be--a making present"[45] as one imaginative mind freely responds to another:

> In Stratford we are all very much aware of a responsibility, through bold experiment and the risk of failure, to create a new tradition, to put into question the entire process of interpretation, to revivify Shakespeare's meaning, moment for moment, with today's means for today's spectators.[46]

Brook is prudent in his choice of words: revitalising a script is a responsibility, not a limitless liberty, a matter not of indulgently imposing one's will upon it but of allowing the text, always the primary source of impulse, to impinge upon the self that is the product of past truths but not subject to them. It is a matter, again,

of working from the outside in, of being "Open" to an order that must be revered before it can distend to gather an auxiliary truth:

> "Listen to what the movement of the words is telling you.
> . . . Work can only be done," he continued, "with a sense of
> the magical word. Then the whole world *opens*."[47]

On the subject of directors' attitudes to the work of past authors, Chaikin, more conservative than Brook, insists that the director must be bound by the explicitly knowable circumstances of the original. The text, for Chaikin, is more than a formal construct diversely subject to a plethora of external alliances; rather, it is a body of intended meaning punctuated by more or less explicit pointers which must be respected to the very limit of their signification. At once approving and constrained by this equation of regard with inflexibility, Chaikin, in the twenty years of the Open Theatre's existence, directed only six plays with preexisting scripts.[48] He prefers instead to collaborate with living authors with whom "Openness," being mutually viable, is less dangerously subtle.

Chaikin's work on the Open Theatre's production of *The Serpent* began as a series of images assembled collectively by actors and writers in workshop improvisations. Scenarios would emerge through a dialectic fundamental to improvisation between the images conceived privately (inner) and those encountered by the actors in rehearsal (outer). Chaikin describes the issue of Eden:

> One actor will get up and do his garden, and if another
> actor is sensitive to it, he will join him so that they make
> a little world. A third actor may or may not join--depend-
> ing on whether this garden does or does not signal anybody,
> give them something they can identify with or understand.
> Then its over and somebody else tries it. Soon somebody
> will start a world with its own logic, its own rules, and its
> own sense of things. Then we have a garden. Ah, but its
> so delicate, the process.[49]

Within a world worlds combine to produce a world. The actors are at once writers, directors, performers and the audience; the dramatists are the editors, shaping in action the energy generated in each of theatre's departments.

According to Albert Hunt, Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare Company's *US* was, similarly, the product of "a collective search by a group of people who wanted to say something true and honest and useful about a subject we all felt was very important--the Vietnam

war. . . . It was a statement that had grown out of a process of work,
and not one that had been conceived in Brook's mind before the
process began."[50] The emphasis is on "process," a word, central to
the notion of an Open Theatre, that Hunt's narrative shares with
Chaikin's. The methods referred to in each case are almost identical.
Hunt again:

> The actors would improvise on material which we would
> offer them, and a playwright would take and shape what the
> actors produced. Brook also invited the actors to bring
> material of their own, which several of them did.[51]

Brook's belief that the play would "have to be made in a new
way,"[52] however, stemmed not from any self imposed sense of con-
straint with regard to adapting the work of absent writers but from
his dissatisfaction with the quality of the available dramatic material
on the subject, from his conviction that "no individual playwright
working alone seemed able, at the moment, to handle a direct state-
ment of that size."[53] Reading through the scripts that had come into
the Royal Shakespeare Company, Brook concluded that "no play existed
that was in any way adequate; in working together we should try to
create circumstances in which such a play could be written"[54] for "a
writer may delve more deeply when confronted by actors' work which
was unsupported by an existing script."[65]

Collaborative playmaking of this kind has the advantage, first,
that insofar as the process involves the constant testing of material in
performance conditions--in action, that is to say, as opposed to an
author's imagined sense of action--that which is approved by the
group has the sanction not merely of an author's theoretical sense of
what is likely to work in the theatre, but of that which is known to
work. Secondly, in performer-initiated constructs the visual dimen-
sion of theatre, often treated as secondary in the playing of set texts,
assumes a refreshing centrality. Emphasis shifts from the illustration
in action of fundamentally linguistic concepts to invention based in
the spatial medium. As the semiotics of gesture and configuration
precede the verbal, externality--and in particular the use of the
body--becomes an additional source of theatrical invention, bringing
with it an order of technique and meaning hitherto little explored.
Hunt's *US* narrative contains a striking instance of the way in which
the actor's language of action can create where an author's words
have failed:

> At this point we were stuck. Apart from the very obvious
> statement . . . there seemed to be very little to say. And

then Mike Williams suddenly demonstrated the kind of theatre language we were looking for. He found an image that made the connection in concrete terms. He put a chair on a table, crumpled some paper and took a match. Then, speaking very simply the words of the letter about the butterfly piece, he climbed on to the chair and pretended to drench himself in petrol. As he reached the words 'Isn't it wonderful to listen to something you normally look at?' he struck the match. The image suddenly pulled together the two worlds. . . . The words revealed the immolation as a dramatic event--and the action placed the words in a wider context.[56]

As a medium of invention rather than a secondary dimension of signification, the body is not, in performance, restricted to housing a character merely but becomes a tool to be anyhow employed to express. The body may become an object or a part of an object, a metaphor or a mood in turn, in Chaikin a serpent or an apple tree or both at once:

Roy London arranged several actors, including himself, into a single creature with five flicking tongues and ten undulating arms and hands. Immediately the workshop recognised its serpent. . . . Then someone tried putting apples into the creature's hands. And it became a bizarre, stunning amalgam of serpent and tree.[57]

Roy London's image for God symbolises, in many ways, the essential dynamics of this mode of visualisation through collective improvisation. Eileen Blumenthal tells the story:

Chaikin asked everyone to bring in an image for God. . . . Several actors improvised living pictures. . . . Roy London had a good idea which he demonstrated: Whenever God was speaking through Adam, he walked over and grabbed Phil under the arms from behind and shook him violently, then walked away. . . .

In the final version of *The Serpent*, as God entered Eden, the actor who had been playing the heron lifted Adam for God's words, dropped him for Adam's reply, lifted him again for God's response, and so forth.[58]

An externally imposed condition induces, in an actor sufficiently "Open" to its influence, an appropriate internal response. Representational energy flows from an external condition through the body to the mind or the emotional state it serves. A single actor is energised by, and transfers energy to, other actors with whom he or she is united in a single, developing theatrical image whose foundation is the body first and the senses after. A single image combines with alternative scenarios to produce meaning which is visual first and language after.

VI

Open work is most interesting when the forms it employs in workshop are retained, as above, in performance. Rhythms or properties, discussed thus far as means to psychological escalation through autonomous suggestion become vehicles for the final expression of those conditions. Here somatic agents, bearing only a structural relation to the observable patterns of reality, are not dropped as they generate emotion complexes which may be harnessed to inform a greater realism; instead, assuming the evident links between these forms and the responses they draw are as true for audiences as they are for the actors, these innovative "outer" worlds are retained with modifications as bearers of meaning in what becomes an alternative convention which may deny realism altogether. Instead of glossing over the paradox of theatre's having to masquerade as reality whilst being quite obviously a fictive construct, the Open theatre may exploit it for richer, expressionistic effects. Reality may be depicted not as it is seen in life but in terms of what the performers feel about that reality. Whilst in realism the outer is bound up in the outer, externality depicted externally, Open theatre may attempt to fertilise the outer with the inner, unite reality with the feelings that it generates. As the subject of a performance shifts from reality (outer) to what a group feels about that reality (inner), the vehicle of that feeling becomes a form that is not a replica of that reality but a formal equivalent of it, an objective correlative, reality distilled through the feelings. The impulse here is to construct rather than to copy, to invent rather than to reproduce, to transform rather than to accept what is seen. The center of interest here lies not in subject matter alone but in its effects upon the creative powers of the group, in that which the group (inner), influenced by the subject (outer), is capable of adding to it from itself.

In *US* theatre reaches, in this manner, beyond fact to the deeper currents of feeling and formality which are, for Brook, theatre's strength. "We were not interested in Theatre of Fact," declares Brook

in his Introduction to *The Book of US*, and his reasons, in the context, are obvious:

> How were we to say anything about a peasant culture when
> none of us knew anything about peasants? Were we simply
> to ask actors to imitate Vietnamese peasants rather badly?[59]

When the outer remains outer, truth cannot accrue. The outer (in this case Vietnam) must be fertilised by the inner (the experience of the actors) if meaning is to be realised:

> And was this not pointing once again to the basic truth
> that our real material was *these* actors confronting *that*
> audience in the Aldwych theatre--and that our language
> would have to be based primarily on this existential fact.[60]

> Whatever was communicated finally would come, not through
> a skilful imitation of pain, but through that confrontation.[61]

The Editorial Forward to *The Book of US* puts the position of the group quite clearly in its first sentence: *US* is the product of "the attempt to distil a theatre performance for London out of the immense flood of information about Vietnam and the thoughts and feelings of a group of actors, writers, directors, designers, musicians."[62] Albert Hunt takes up the question of this need to unite inner and outer:

> We were going to examine our own attitudes, to ask our-
> selves as totally as possible how the Vietnam war affected
> *us*.[63]

The "*US*" of the title was then deliberately ambiguous--signifying the United States and London, the war and the theatre, outer and inner.

Work on *US* began with the question, "If I say I care about Vietnam (outer), how does this influence the way I spend my time (inner)?"[64] The most potent answer to the question had, of course, come from a Buddhist monk in Saigon who had burnt himself to death as a protest against the war. The image haunted Brook and came, gradually, to dominate the play as a metaphor for the dual concern of the group--war and the reaction to it, outer and inner burning. The exploration of the phenomenon in workshop, however, revealed the inevitable, and in the context poignant, gap between what the actors pretended in improvisations to feel (outer) and the disturbing impulses

they nevertheless carried, unrealised, within (inner). Michael Kustow's *US* narrative entry of August 31, 1966, carries a description of a most delicate exercise designed by Brook to bridge this gap. Kustow's account is extensive but must, if the work is to be appreciated, be quoted at length:

> Brook: 'I want you to start by searching deeply for the idea of being dead. It's nothing to do with imagination or the idea of having been; just try and get as close as you can to the problem of being nothing, now.[65]

The slate wiped clean. That this may be achieved only partially is, in the context of what is to follow, irrelevant. What is important is that the actors, in making the attempt to reach zero, appreciate through experience the symbolic if not real value of starting at scratch. It is sufficient to the purposes of the exercise that nothing-ness is, at this stage, an act of will merely:

> 'Next; you're no longer dead, you're alive. Listen deeply to what, in the quietest sense is the feeling of being alive. What is the smallest difference between that nothingness, that emptiness, and being alive.[66]

The inner. Again, that the trance may be incomplete is incon-sequential.
The condition is a springboard merely; concrete elements follow:

> 'Now you have just one possibility: you may place beside you one person, one person who is breathing with you, the person who is closest to you. . . .

> 'Now you have a possibility of choice: you may have one of your faculties. . . . Let that one chosen faculty flower. Test your choice . . . can you find complete life in that one choice? Is it better than death?

> 'Now you have another possibility: you may only bring to life one point of your body . . .

> 'Now a new possibility: you can live with your whole body, but only in a small closed room. Seek the things and people you need to live. What is the *least* you need to live?

'Now come out of the room into the outside world. As you put your hand on the doorhandle, decide on the one thing in the outside world that makes you want to go out.[67]

The movement from inner to outer is carefully constructed in stages. The restrictions discipline the impulse outward, compelling the actors to choose and therefore explore minutely, to live through contrasts and thereby appreciate utterly, the value of and their reliance on essential externals.

The second stage of the exercise requires the actors to relinquish in stages these life supports:

After a break, Brook set up five benches, and did the entire exercise in reverse. . . . Each actor had to take six steps which would lead him to the end of the bench and off. But each step could only be taken after the actor had:

discarded the world and why it mattered
discarded the closed room with precious possessions
discarded the one living point in the body
discarded the one living faculty
discarded the one needed person discarded the feel of being
just alive, accepted death.[68]

The movement from outer to inner, burning what has been known intimately, what has been felt deeply to be essential, what is of profoundest value. "Most of the actors," Kustow tells us, "got to step four; Bob Lloyd got to step five and stuck."[69] After a break "Brook talked to the actors about the particular kinds of burning they were being asked to portray. . . . He then asked them to do home work-- to try and find a line through the many facets of the war we were presenting (outer), a line that would concern their final decision to burn (inner)."[70]

In the early stages of the work on *US*, Charles Wood came up with a speech that used this connection:

I think I'm Vietnam. Once knew a bloke thought he was Ghana. Knew another, thought he was France.[71]

Albert Hunt comments on the speech that through it "one could begin to see the way in which an interchange of this kind could lead to practical working material."[72] Insofar as war is the product of the conflict between divergent inner orders (Dr. Fairbank at the Fulbright Committee Hearings on Vietnam, "Great nations on both sides are

pursuing their alternative dreams"[73]), expressionistic interchange became a useful means of making incompatibility the subject and style of the show. As Brook writes,

> We were interested in the theatre of confrontation. . . .
> *US* used a multitude of contradictory techniques to change
> direction and to change levels. It aimed to put the incom-
> patible side by side. . . . At the very end all pretenses at
> playacting ceased and actor and audience together paused at
> the moment when they and Vietnam were looking one
> another in the face.[74]

VII

It was through what Hunt calls "interchange" and Brook a "mult-itude of contradictory techniques" that *US* transcended purely docu-mentary status (outer merely) and became "something else . . . a theatre of compassionate involvement (inner)."[75] In the script as it now exists discrete groups of images fill a loosely episodic whole with scenes and moods following each other in an unsettling counterpoint of event and tableaux, crisis and distance. In the torture sequence in Act One the moment of greatest physical violence (inner) is frozen and leads quickly into an interview (outer), thereby emphasising not brutality merely (outer) but the response to it (inner), not the U.S. alone but us. Again, as characters lose their individuality, actors are compelled to change roles and functions rapidly, moving suddenly between the realistic and the grotesque, representation and caricature. In a scene based on what Joseph Chaikin calls "perfect people im-provisations" (designed to explore the manner in which outer masks conceal inner realities), American GI's confess their deepest motives while staring blankly out into the audience in what then becomes a comment on societies' professed outrage and their incapacity to act upon it.

In the second half of *US* a young man, frustrated by his inability to do anything about the war, proposes to commit suicide. As a young girl attempts to dissuade him a dialectic is generated that reproduces almost exactly a situation in workshop where Mark, asked to prepare a suicide scene, was confronted by Canaan working off a clipboard of questions. In rehearsal the questioning served to probe Mark's con-viction, and if the play had been staged within the terms of psycho-logical realism, this would have the advantage of heightening Mark's belief in his role. Retained as such in performance, however, the exercise has a far more deeply disturbing effect as the focus shifts from Mark to other people, other characters, the audience, and their

capacity to act. The close focus on self-examination in the scene (inner) makes a deliberately disquieting contrast with the broad historical sweep (outer) of the first half. In workshop, the contrast grew out of a conscious division of emphasis in the three distinct stages of rehearsal:

> Brook spoke to the company, 'We are now entering the third stage of our work. In the first, you opened up as many fields as you could, ranged as widely through our knowledge and ignorance and images as you could (outer). With Grotowski (who worked with the company for a short period) you explored deeply and intensely a very focussed, tight, personal area of commitment, your own bodily commitment as actors (inner). Now in the third stage, we shall broaden our scope again. But the intense personal exploration will continue.[76]

In the third stage of rehearsal--that leading into performance--history and the self were, as the title of the show demanded, to be seen as one.

VIII

In the final script the passage from outer to inner between Act One and Act Two is mirrored within each act: in Act Two the intense dialectic between Glenda and Mark is invaded by a sequence of dreams connected with ending the war and deepening human consciousness. In Act One the frenetic clamour of the war breaks abruptly into the stillness of Mike's inward looking "Why are we bombing them everyday?" speech. In the soliloquy, bewilderment is expressed in the apparent contradictions in the language which is nevertheless held together by an absurd inner logic reminiscent of Beckett:

> The more I alienate myself from everything they do internationally (outer) the more I seem to get mixed up with them personally (inner).[77]

Anguish turns to irony as Mike inverts what is to be Martin's "inner" position in Act Two:

> Indignant over my coffee, I am at the moment quite willing to sacrifice the entire South Vietnamese people for my principles.[78]

In Act Two Barry, picking up Mike's self-conscious reference to this reversal, "Mr. Hyde has a buddy called Jekyll"[79] and leading to Marjie's equally self-conscious "the influence of Yeats on Yeats"[80] makes the connections--between Act One and Act Two, between character and action, between performance and audience, between, that is to say, inner and outer as they coexist within the self:

> I film myself . . . I watch myself . . . watching my-self.[81]

If the play is at once about the war in Vietnam and attitudes to the war in London, audiences at the Aldwych, in watching the play, watch themselves.   This is Open theatre at its most immediate--as Bryan Magee reports in the *Listener*:

> My emotional complacency has not been so shattered, my defences so pierced and prised *open*. . . .[82]

However, there is a curious moral solidarity amongst some on the subject of political drama by which they require of such plays that they be rather more unequivocally "committed" to a "stand" or a "position".   By these standards the emphasis on the "we" element in *US* is a reprehensible luxury, exploitative to exotic and irrelevant aesthetic ends of the real suffering of a people; and *US* has been variously criticised for the absence of a coherent "statement" about the war, Brook for his ill directed tendency to aestheticism.   At its worst such criticism becomes the "you are either part of the solution, or you are part of the problem" brand of sloganeering that seems to have been popular amongst students in the late 1960's.   At its best it draws attention to the obligation, built into political theatre, to evaluate, to take sides.   What such criticism misses, of course, is that Brook does take sides, he does evaluate, only he does not do so in the manner in which we are accustomed to seeing political issues dramatised.

Overtly political drama of the kind that issues "statements" faces two principal dangers.   First, in making spectators listen to and accept what is said, it faces defensive intellectual resistance to the often condescending "us vs. them", "I am right, you are wrong" situation.   It is of course possible for the spectator to align his or her sympathies with the sensitive "us" rather than the brutal "them", but this only leads to the second danger--complacency, where the drama faces the possibility of its making no significantly political impression at all.   In his essay "On Political Theatre" Michael Kirby tells the story of a general who enjoyed Joan Littlewood's anti-war play *Oh What a Lovely War* more than any play he had seen.   In "Humane Literacy" George

Steiner remarks that one is often able to respond more acutely to literary sorrow than to the misery next door. It is of course precisely this negligence--that which parades ineffectually as concern--that Brook wishes to draw our attention to in *US*. The "statement" in *US* is that we are too little concerned. The play acknowledges that theatre is limited in its capacity to initiate social action. Theatre can move society to action only if the impulse to action already exists in that society. If it does not, theatre can only help to generate that impulse. To make an explicit statement condemning US policy in Vietnam would only be to elicit the sympathy of the audience, allow them comfortably to take the side of justice. There would be no profit in such indignation. There would be a point only in an effect that ran deeper than armchair intellectual discourse on outer issues, in effects that seek to change the inner existential nature of the spectator by sometimes irrational, often highly disturbing means. Brook's play assumes that individual spiritual change is a precondition for meaningful exterior political change. Both political and aesthetic vitality is a function of free passage between the inner and the outer, twin facets of a single reality. In the play, Clifford explains:

> Each human being will be taught to understand that the entire history of evolution [outer] is recorded inside his body [inner].[83]

It is the lesson an Englishman once learnt out in India.

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Notes

1. Jean Claude Carriere and Peter Brook, *The Conference of the Birds* (Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1982) 4.
2. Eileen Blumenthal, *Joseph Chaikin* (Cambridge UP, 1984) 108.
3. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Penguin, 1968) 40. My italics.
4. 47.
5. *TDR*, 9, No. 2 (Winter 1964) 193.
6. Peter Brook 58. My italics.
7. It is peculiarly this phenomenon, of course, that makes it possible for good criticism to reveal to author's dimensions of significance unrecognised by them in the writing.
8. David Selbourne, *The Making Of A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London: Metuen) 71.
9. 181.
10. 21.
11. 101.

12. Charles Marowitz, *The Act of Being* (New York: Taplinger, 1978) 12.

13. 14.

14. See Harold Clurman's thirties memoir *The Fervent Years*: "Strasberg," he writes, "was a fanatic on the subject of true emotion. Everything was secondary to it."

15. 20.

16. Eileen Blumenthal 54.

17. Charles Marowitz 14.

18. Eileen Blumenthal 153.

19. David Selbourne page II.

20. Eileen Blumenthal 56.

21. 46.

22. 83.

23. 86.

24. 73.

25. David Selbourne 31.

26. 105.

27. 85.

28. 175.

29. 201.

30. Eileen Blumenthal 69.

31. 51.

32. Peter Brook 131.

33. Eileen Blumenthal 15.

34. 15.

35. 38.

36. 66.

37. 66.

38. J.C. Trewin, *Peter Brook: A Biography* (London: Macdonold, 1971) 51.

39. 189.

40. John Heilpern, *Conference Of The Birds* (New York: Penguin, 1977) 83. My italics.

41. J.C. Trewin 123.

42. Peter Brook 47.

43. 14.

44. 19.

45. 155.

46. J.C. Trewin 142.

47. David Selbourne 99. My italics.

48. Interestingly, Blumenthal notes that Chaikin has broken his rule of non-invasive fidelity more often than he has adhered to it: "His *Antigone* was a new, somewhat altered version; his *Electra*, starting out from the Sophocles original, became a totally new play." Eileen Blumenthal 188.

49. 110.

50. The Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Book of US* 12.

51. 17-18.

52. 13.

53. 13.

54. 13.

55. 36.

56. 20.

57. Eileen Blumenthal 112-113.

58. 119.

59. The Royal Shakespeare Company 26.

60. 26.

61. 23.

62. Editorial Forward.

63. 17.

64. 14.

65. 139.
66. 139.
67. 139-140.
68. 140.
69. 140.
70. 140.
71. 16.
72. 16.
73. 14.
74. 10.
75. 93.
76. 135.
77. 93.
78. 93.
79. 122.
80. 180.
81. 167.
82. 172. My italics.
83. 172.